

# STILL LIFE

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J. MIDDLETON MURRY

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**STILL LIFE**

TO  
K. M.  
AND  
L. H. B.

# STILL LIFE

BY

J. MIDDLETON MURRY

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# STILL LIFE

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

"BETTER make an end of it. . . . Better make an end of it. . . . Better make an end of it. . . ." The steady beat of the night train from the German frontier to Paris became part of the argument. It was the argument. Maurice wondered whether he was anything save this monotonous reinforcement of his flagging purpose. Perhaps if the train stopped, he would stop too. After all it was only his cowardice. He had decided as much as he could decide that he would see her once more and tell her that it was impossible. Immediately she would understand, for nothing could be clearer than the certainty that he could not get on with his work in life unless they parted. He was not sure what he meant by his work in life, but it needed all of him, or it needed all that thinking part of him which she could so easily break down by one of her absurdly misspelt letters. "Tu m'a fais beaucoup de peine." Oh, yes, he'd written to her to say he would come back to see her. How could he have done otherwise? He was going to explain it all to-morrow. He was afraid. He was afraid of her silent eyes when the tears stood in them; above all afraid of himself who would hold her in his arms and tell lies about loving her. She would not believe what he would say; and he was afraid of the part of him that would watch her as she tried to believe. He was afraid of everything which brought them together. "Better make an end of it. . . ."

He watched a fat and wheezing Alsatian crawl over the floor, picking up the cigars the frontier customs men had strewn about, and listened vaguely to his curses. He looked out of the window towards some furnaces that flamed into the black sky ; then back to the dull khaki-coloured seats.

She had no right to cling to him and drag him down. She must have known that love like theirs did not last, was never meant to last. She had had plenty of affairs before ; but because this was his first love she was determined to hold him for ever. He saw Madeleine as Machiavellian, and burst into weak anger against her. It was not that she was in love with him ; she saw in him that to which she might fasten and save herself from being swept away by her own desire to love. Besides, she had never made even a pretence of understanding him. He had a mind that worked somewhere far away from them both, a stupid mind perhaps but which he loved and which was wholly him. He had ideals, or rather, he thought as he vaguely probed the mist to find what they might be, he had a capacity for ideals with which she could never sympathise. She had never displayed a shadow of interest in that ; and once when he had spoken to her in his half-tentative, half-pompous way about writing a book, she had only made a mouth and said that all she could bear to read was *histoires d'amour*.

Now he seemed to have his trouble in perspective. Their whole beings stood asunder. She understood him only when he was a child. He could not help being a child sometimes and putting his head upon her breast and looking up to be kissed ; and then he had felt that life was wondrously easy if one only let oneself be carried along with the flood. But since he had been away from her the impulse had left him. He had won small victories with his brain, insignificant to all save him alone, victories which seemed to show him that there lay the road by which he must travel to win anything permanent from the life which passed before his eyes continually, in colour like the



dun carriage cushions, lighted as the carriage by a low-turned lamp that only deepened the shadows and made nothing plain. He had won something in the six months since he had seen her, if it were no more than a vague indication of where he must choose ; and by so much he was strengthened against her now, but so little strengthened that he had a double fear of what she might take from him. He had piled stone on tiny stone to make a wall against her, and he felt that she had power in a second by a word or a glance to topple it down as though it had never been.

"But still," he thought, "if she wins it is because I don't deserve to." The burst of fatalism gave him a spurious courage. He tried to prevent his thought from turning back upon itself to test its own truth, but in vain. People may be false to their ideals however true, he thought. Not all who are beaten are beaten because they do not deserve to win. The right to victory comes only by long practice and incessant tempering of a will which is not given to a man in its final perfection, but created by each successive impulse to conquest.

It did not take him long to shatter his own fatalistic confidence. Then he said to himself : "This is a struggle which means years to you. If you win, you win something for ever." Came his answer : "If you lose, you will have many chances still." He was always opening a way of escape for himself ; and he knew that, although his articulate thought would not allow it, he had acquiesced in his own defeat. She must end it. She would see that he did not love her any more, because she could not fail to see. He summoned up a fine indignation against his cowardice, only to end in a faint suspicion that there was something heroic in remaining with Madeleine. Now he could find in his consciousness no point on which he might lean and resist. All that remained in that chaotic interplay of argument and objection was the deep knowledge that to part finally was right, that all else was wrong, and that he was too weak to do what was right. The train was taking

him there. There was nothing to be done. "Better make an end of it. . . ."

The picture was very clear to him. The only light in his mind was focussed on this thread of his history. He had begun it a boy and now he was a man. He had gone to Paris with a boy's exhilarant expectation of adventure, which he had met with a childish simplicity. With assiduity he had frequented the cafés of the *demi-monde* to attain the easy familiarity of the man of the world. Instead, he had been overwhelmed by a flood of sentimentality; he had fallen in love with all the women, fallen even more deeply in love with his own prodigious conceit of understanding them, as he called it in his innocence.

He had tramped on Christmas Eve in the company of a tribe of students from some curious Eastern country whose name he never could make out, singing songs which he did not understand, buying gingerbread from the *baraaues*, which he could not eat, nervously aiding and abetting them while they accosted women, to whom if he spoke he would behave as in an English drawing-room. His desire to be accepted as normal in a city where there is no surface normality, and his tormenting self-consciousness while he strove to achieve this desire, drove him into company he hated, and compelled him to do and say things in which he had no heart. He was acutely miserable during that Christmas, because he knew he was guilty of treachery towards himself; because he was miserable he felt the imperious need of some sincere affection. If he could only unburden himself of his troubles and put away this tyrannous pretence of manifold experience in another's presence, he knew he would regain some of his happiness; but he was afraid that the other would laugh at him or laugh his trouble away. His fear of being misunderstood held him back, and in the fear there was a little pride, as always in him, at the thought that he was so individual that he probably would be misunderstood. But the comfort of his pride weighed as nothing against his misery.



They stopped Madeleine on the Boulevard. She was known to him by sight already. Maurice watched her dully, for his eyes were fastened upon two cherries which bobbed their independent life upon her hat.

"Behrens has been looking for you for days. I believe the poor idiot has made himself ill over you. He wasn't at dinner."

The man who spoke swayed his body so that the sleeves of his coat, slung round his shoulders, swung against her to show his absolute indifference, for her, for Behrens, for both of them together.

"Can't help it," she said. "I've been properly ill since I saw you last. Anyhow, what have I to do with Behrens?—what a name!—he's only a silly baby." She seemed to be laughing at the recollection of him. Maurice remembered him for a rather dirty, childish, stupid fellow who was tremendously addicted to talking of his exploits at "le footing." He had been sitting in a café one evening when Madeleine had upset his chair from behind; and Maurice had watched the struggle in his face between discomfited dignity and a lurking suspicion that this was a declaration of love.

She tapped with her foot on the ground, smiling at her thoughts. Tall and slim, with her head bent slightly forward over her insignificant muff, the red cherries bobbing in her hat as she tapped the ground, she seemed to fit well into the picture into which he shaped the recollections of the café. He could not tolerate that she should address all her conversation to the others.

"Have you been very ill? What's been the matter with you?"

She turned to him, glanced him up and down with the same smile.

"Bon jour, mon petit Anglais! Oh, only something wrong with my lungs—going out without a coat. I'm all right now, you see." She flung out her arms and held back her head that he should inspect her.

"I am very glad." He couldn't find anything to say. Someone was making more jokes about Behrens. To his surprise his usual uncomprehending laugh failed him. He had an idea that they were cruel and vulgar.

The party moved on. Maurice, the last to shake hands with her, took off his hat, looking straight into her eyes. He wished he could say something. He was not sure whether the laughter in her eyes meant that she found him more ridiculous than another, or more pleasant. He vigorously insisted with his companions that she was very different from the rest; but they paid not the least attention to the subject save that one remarked that Behrens was an utter fool.

The same night as he left the café, with half-formed purpose, tailing behind his friends, he caught sight of her at a table alone. With a great effort to nerve himself he turned from the door and walked towards her. He asked her whether she would come and have dinner with him to-morrow. It was not much of a restaurant, he thought suddenly, as he told her where he dined; indeed, it was the cheapest in the neighbourhood. There was time for him first to curse himself for not having proposed something better, then to congratulate himself for thus suggesting to her that he was different, before he heard her reply.

"I should like to very much. I know the place. To-morrow, then." He knew that he looked happy and was sure that she noticed it when he said good-bye, dashed out of another door and joined the others at the corner. Nobody remarked his manoeuvre. He was profoundly relieved.

Such was the beginning. After that eventful dinner they had sat together in a café. Feeling that he was now caught into a process which he could not control, he surrendered himself. A woman glanced at him and whispered a question to Madeleine: "Was he her lover?" He heard it. Delight passed into intoxication at her reply:

"I don't know . . . Perhaps." Then he saw her look at him as though there were no doubt at all ; nor did he worry as he would have done the day before, whether it was that he was raised in his own estimation or whether something outside himself had for the first time laid hold upon him utterly. But not all his intoxication swept away the timidity that held him when he wanted to kiss her. He was so frightened and so determined that he proclaimed his intention in steady and colourless French ; but as he looked at her eyes, brown and laughing, he saw that the laughter had decided itself. She was laughing, not at him but for him. And so they kissed. He was beside himself. He gave her everything he had that might be a keepsake, a tiny gold pin, his only jewellery, and a little leather card-case, which could have been of no use to her. He taught her how to pronounce his name English. When he left her, she said she would be there the next evening at ten.

He waited in agony. From seven o'clock onwards he could not steady himself for a moment. He was much too early at the rendezvous, and he waited ; for waiting seemed now to him to have acquired a positive quality of torture, as though a man might achieve a destiny of waiting and then die. He saw nothing, not even the clock which slowly hypnotised his sight. He was a thing that waited. Suddenly somebody, in recollection he thought a woman, asked if he was Monsieur Maurice who was waiting for Madeleine, and put a note into his hand. "I am ill. I cannot come out to-night. Will you come to see me ? " He started up in a fury of motion, which was checked a little, not satisfied as he groped his way up a dark staircase. He saw her lying on her bed, her dark brown hair dishevelled over the pillow, made blacker by the little light that came from a smoky lamp on the mantelpiece. Madeleine raised herself to stretch out her arms towards him.

"Tu m'aimes alors, mon petit Maurice ? "

"Oui, je t'aime."

He kissed her many times, covering himself about with



her affection. He was in love with the shelter which she afforded him, with the freedom he had with her to be a child, securely. Having found that which he desired, he desired no more.

After many days they were lovers, he almost against his will, she in the desire to give him all she had to give, forcing him to accept everything. He was afraid to refuse and to hear her say: "Then you don't love me?" He answered her question: "Are you happy?" with "Yes," truly; because he could not yet tell what that might be which so profoundly bade him say "No." He was frightened by a sure instinct which told him that he had lost everything because she had given everything. Half-intoxicated, half in terror at some power which he had awakened he passed a few days of nervous tormented hours until the time came for him to leave Paris. He was frightened when he was with her, but always a little of the first security remained; when they were apart he lost even this. At the very moment when they were saying "good-bye" on the station, and he heard himself promising to write every day and to be back with her within a month, he began to see clearly. She had given him all, and she was now seeking in him the secure protection, the opportunity of surrender, which he himself had found in her and had magnified into love; and because she had thrust all that she had into his keeping she had forced him into sheltering her. He who could not maintain himself, had now to support her. He would have to assure her continually of a love which he did not feel and had never felt; and as the train left the station, he knew that hypocrisy had begun, that it would grow to a canker because of his cowardice, and would end only if his cowardice, by its very extremity, passed into bravery.

"Better make an end of it. . . . Better make an end of it. . . ." He had seen truly, for perhaps his only virtue was his ability to see into the movements of his own mind. He examined himself so often and instinctively that his whole

life seemed to be histrionic, broken by one only impulse to throw himself into another's keeping, and thus be rid of the unending necessity of choosing and acting the part he chose. By some strange and tragic inevitability, at the moment when this impulse was most fully satisfied, and he had lost for days and weeks the consciousness of his accusing mind, he had been forced into a posture of strength, wholly foreign to him. Before he had written the first letter to her he knew that his one desire was never to see her again, to forget her, if he could forget, and the knowledge was never more clear than on the day of their first parting. There remained to complete his misery his knowledge of the cowardice that held him from telling her the truth. Every time that he wrote a letter he watched himself with disgusted curiosity construct phrases of deep affection ; every time he received a letter from her, a wave of sentiment, which he knew for false at the very moment that it made him cry, broke over him and urged him on to yet another hypocrisy. Thus the affair had dragged on monotonously, interrupted only by some momentary heroics when Madeleine wrote to him to say that she was about to have a child. It did not take him more than a few hours to see that his brave resolution to go off and marry her was but the expression of his supremest cowardice, and thenceforward he despised himself even more profoundly than before. He put off their meeting as long as he could, while his terror of action contorted itself within him, so that he longed to postpone his final cowardice out of cowardice itself. His mind was tinged by a shadowy faith that all difficulties disappeared spontaneously by lapse of time, and his very irresolution took on the appearance of indefinable virtue. Nevertheless, at the last he had found himself relentlessly driven towards her, and now in the train which bore him towards the dreaded meeting his mind was divided in incessant debate with his will. The struggle had reached its most acute stage, and as he lay back in the corner he felt tired. He was impotently con-

scious that he was smiling at the panting, swearing figure of the Alsatian picking up the last cigar.

“Better make an end of it. . . . Better make an end of it. . . .” It would be a good thing to be an engine-driver, with the same pair of straight rails always before him, and nothing to do save to shovel on coal. Then he thought of the men he knew, who never had and never would have to deal with troubles such as his. He thought of Dupont, the Frenchman with whom alone he had the careless intimacy of mutual incomprehensibility, Dupont who said that you must never love a woman more than three or four days, but during those three or four days you must never think of anything else, never leave her for a moment, and thus, knowing her to the last hiding-places of her mind, break with her once for all, leaving no thread of the unknown or the unexplored to bind you to her. Otherwise—he recollected the expressive gesture with which Dupont had enforced the words—she clings to you and conquers you, enticing you with that in her mind which you have not paused to discover. This was the philosophy on which Dupont had always acted, and it had never failed him. He went straight towards his goal, hindered by no woman, yet knowing more, and adored by more than Maurice had ever dreamed of. Soon after he had first been parted from Madeleine, Dupont had discovered him sending her money and had laughed ; and he had had to conceal the enormity of his offence by an air of nonchalance, for fear of being finally despised. Why was he alone forced to drink the cup to the dregs, he alone compelled to drag out months and years oppressed by a history that had ended in three weeks ? His indignation against destiny and the fatality of his own temperament was easily quelled. He knew too well that the ultimate answer was always the same—cowardice ; and he had passed beyond the stage wherein he could let it masquerade under the name of affection or decency and suffer the deceit. Even the infinitesimal labour of unmasking himself became monotonous. He



forced himself for a moment to regard the matters of fact. He had written to Madeleine to say that he would be in Paris the next day and would immediately send her word where he was staying. He congratulated himself she would not be at the station to meet him and take him off his guard. Between then and to-morrow he would have time to pull himself together; besides, it was tyranny that he should have to think more about the affair now that he was tired out. He would not think about it again until he arrived. He did not think any more because he had thought everything; but the beating of the train upon the rails left him no peace.

"Better make an end of it. . . . Better make an end of it. . . ."

He climbed down from the train, conscious of nothing save that a tired porter had his bag, that the station was very dark, and that he was shivering though the air was warm. It was eleven o'clock. There seemed to be no life anywhere, and least of all where the waiters of the station café crawled about in their bright country. In just a few bars and shops the light won a little ground from the darkness, but even there it was dim and unreal. Sometimes at its brightest a stream of metallic blue poured in through the windows of the cab. Suddenly a cart halted far ahead in the line of close-following traffic and the sound of stopping ran consecutively from carriage to carriage, like the sound of the marbles he used to run along his desk-groove at school. There was a man with a hand-cart between his cab and the omnibus in front, and as the omnibus stopped dead the man preposterously lifted his leg into the air, to prevent himself from colliding with the tail of the omnibus. Somebody laughed. The man kept his leg there for an eternity. Everything was grotesque and unreal. The porter of his remote hotel rubbed his eyes as he slouched to the cab-door and trailed upstairs with the bag.

Maurice saw his hands in a circle of light on the table and found himself writing, with a curiously definite know-

ledge of times and dates. "I am here. I shall wait for you to-morrow at seven." After he had left her Madeleine had gone into a milliner's shop, where she worked every day until half-past six. She could not see him earlier; nor could he visit her, because she lived *en pension* in a cheap boarding-house. He went out to post the letter, walked about for a few minutes, then went to his room again and slept.

The next day he felt nothing but the fatigue of long exhaustion. Wandering about to find old acquaintances, he seldom thought of the meeting; he had no power to wonder about it any more, for that part of him was numbed. The mental stress had passed into physical. His body was sick as he dragged up and down stairs, and friends innumerable shook him by the hand and said, "You're not looking very fit, Temple." He felt his own smile as he made the invariable answer: "I'm not much good at these all-night train journeys." He went to see Miss Etheredge, who had known him and Madeleine together. She spoke as though the affair belonged to the past.

"But she was quite different from the general run. She was just a country child, who had lost her bearings in a strange place. You couldn't help it; but it wasn't fair the way you had with her. . . . You're too young, too much of a child yourself, you know; so you upset her values for her. Took her into the domestic, darn your socks and look after the baby part of her mind. They haven't got any use for that kind of thing in Paris. No, it wasn't fair. She was happy enough before you turned up and you upset her life for her. Nobody has a right to take a woman like that too seriously. I shan't forget when you'd gone away how I met her in the street and she danced across to me to show me a photo of yourself that you'd sent her. Same one as you sent me, over there! No, you've got something to answer for.

"I don't blame you though. You couldn't help it. You meant it all; but you are such a child. You ought never



to be let loose on a civilisation that doesn't cater for that kind of thing. Still, what does it matter? She's gone back to the country somewhere, to dream of the young and charming Englishman, and have a dozen children by the local butcher, who'll marry her as soon as her family repent enough to put down a hundred pounds. And you've really forgotten her already."

"It can't be irony," Maurice said to himself. "She doesn't know." Then he began to laugh, and to make an arrangement for a day of picture exhibitions. He took out his watch. He had half an hour to cover the ten minutes' walk home. Listening to her conversation, he began to be restless and impatient. She noticed it, and half-jealously, half in contrariety, tried to keep him longer. He decided he would go immediately. Piqued, she said as he opened the door: "You mustn't be late for *her*."

He pondered over the words as he went down the stairs, and wondered how she knew to whom he was going, and whether all the long conversation had been sheer acting. He tried hard to twist himself round so that he could see the matter calmly. The new problem haunted him as he dodged across the streets; and he thought there was something diabolical in the way she had guessed his purpose. He began to construct a romantic story and to convince himself that she was in love with him herself and had spied on Madeleine. That meeting in the street was a queer affair.

He was under the hotel door vaguely remarking that it was five minutes past seven, when it occurred to him that the phrase might not have been very profound after all. It was just a Parthian shot; while he, by not having laughed it off, had let her see that it hit. He was angry at his stupidity. But even then it only meant that he was going to see a woman; it had nothing necessarily to do with Madeleine. He was at the door of his room, without any knowledge of his purpose. Then he remembered.

He had even left his key below; he had not asked

whether a lady had called to see him. At first he was frightened to go downstairs ; then a hungry disappointment swept over him, and he bit his lip to stop the tears that threatened. Madeleine had never come ; she would never come ; he had lost her for ever. He paused on the landing for many minutes, and stiffened himself to drive away the dizziness that invaded him when he slackened his hold upon himself.

It was long before he was steady enough to descend for his key. He would rest a little before asking the porter if anybody had called for him. He crept downstairs. As he picked up the key, someone opened the door of the bureau and addressed him. He listened to a voice.

“ A lady called to see you twice to-day, sir. Once at noon, and just now at seven o'clock. She wouldn't wait. She left this note for you.”

Maurice took the note. It was better not to go upstairs again. He replaced the key. And with the note in his hand left the hotel. He dared not open the envelope, but crumpled it lightly in his pocket as he wandered through the streets, trying to keep himself firm against the anguish that would burst his brain.

Sometime after midnight he managed to open the letter : “ Maurice,” it ran, “ tu m'a cassais le cœur. Tu me trouveras jamais.” He knew that he could not look for her. He would never find her. The search needed strength and he had none. He sat down upon a bench in the street and sobbed.

He felt somebody behind him. A woman touched him, and as he looked up, said, “ Bon soir, mon petit.” Then she suddenly changed her tone. “ Quelqu'un t'a fait du mal ? ” He rose and hurried on.

Now he was alone in the world, he thought, with a sorrow more than he could bear ; and at the moment that his thought began once more, he became a third person watching himself walk up the street with hanging head, too utterly cast down to feel anything but the throbbing

of his own pain. He regarded himself first with interest, then with complacence. He had become a hero to himself, a man of magnificent sorrow, uncomprehended by the crowd of ordinary men that hemmed his life about. Quickly he destroyed the picture, taking pleasure in the thoroughness of his own work of destruction, but the feeling of satisfaction remained, slowly defining itself into self-congratulation. Yes, he was well out of it. What he would never have had the courage to do, had come of its own motion. He was glad. He turned upon himself ruthlessly, pointing the finger of scorn at a victory won by the excess of cowardice alone. He was climbing the hotel stairs once more when the debate in his heart was at its fiercest. He had won by cowardice. Yes, but he had won, by whatever weapons, and he was free. He was bathed in a flood of self-pity for his loneliness, for a freedom which he could not use. He needed the idea, rather the possibility of Madeleine to support him, and the selfishness of his preoccupation forced him to an outburst of commiseration for her. Slowly he reconstructed her day, the blind anguish of her two vain visits to his room, the sudden sense that that whereon, in spite of all misgivings, she had leaned, was void. He would go to find her; he was not a traitor after all. The thought of her suffering would dog him for ever through life. He would tell her that everything was right, for he loved her still; he knew that she would in the end believe him. He heard her cry: "Oh, Maurice."

He did not move from his room, saying that he could not hope to find her at two o'clock in the morning, knowing that he did not intend to throw his victory away.

A few more days in Paris passed mistily before him as though he looked at them through frosted glass. He saw many friends, and talked with them intelligently, trying in particular to convey to a painter the outline of a new æsthetic which was being expounded at Bologna. He was even surprised at the clearness with which ideas unrolled themselves before his mind, and wondered at the unac-



customed precision with which he used blunted and familiar phrases, until he realised that such things were no longer real to him. The impatience he felt with those who listened to him was not the old impatience to make a chaotic and heartfelt creed plain to another mind; rather he was beset by an anxiety to keep another idea from him, which threatened at every moment of slackened attention to invade the barrier of his careful defences.

He was afraid of a letter that might come to him. He was sick with fear that Madeleine would write no letter to him. He could not suffer this twisted thread, yet the only continuous in his life, finally to be broken. Even the knowledge that she was in a slow torment of suspense, or that her pain was so great that she was driven to express it in a cry of despair, would be, he knew when he was honest, precious to him. Even the extreme of her sorrow bound them together, for she grieved for him.

No letter came. As he stood in the clear sunlight that shone through the carriage window, looking out upon the cardboard country that lay between Paris and the sea, listening to the beat of the train upon the rails, which had no message, he wondered whether there was any strange element in that grey and unreal earth which might attract men's souls and hold them fast; for he puzzled how, some few miles back along the railway over which he was being borne, there could be a place where strange and tremendous happenings had overtaken him.

A comfortable curé, shepherding a company of school-boys who pestered him with unnaturally precocious questions, paused in the munching of his sandwich.

"Oui, elle n'est pas mal, la France."

## CHAPTER II

MAURICE shook himself awake and wandered about his room, peering at the titles of his books, bending occasionally over the table to see what manner of book he had been reading and turning over his paper to assure himself that something had been written. The room was small, perched high in the air to glimpse the Thames from the south ; the books were many, ranged carefully in regular shelves upon every wall, surrounding him as with a fence against the world. He made the circuit three or four times, sometimes taking one out to read the scrupulous inscription, sometimes flicking the back of one with his finger-nail and addressing it with serious concentration. While he regarded them he became slowly bemused. Though his books had long been his familiar and only friends, they appeared strange to him. He began to stare at each one as though fascinated by it. They seemed to grow large while he watched and to become terrible—mute and grim and silent.

The dusk of an evening in earliest spring had descended quickly, and with the dusk came silence, palpable and chill. Maurice felt that he dared not pause or the silence would invade him. He began, almost feverishly, to speak ; yet he did not speak aloud : he dared not. He bent down over a book and whispered venomously to it : “ I hate you . . . I hate you.” He held his breath perilously, and waited for the book to strike him. While he waited tense and inflexible, for his punishment, the still silence broke in upon him. ~~For~~ a moment he strove against it vehemently, as though it were some malignant impulse of his own mind which sought to destroy all the house of ideas that he had

so laboriously constructed. He talked rapidly to himself to gain time to collect his strength.

"What have you made of it all since? Cut out women and go for the rest; shut yourself up with books; worry about ideas. Oh, yes, you've cut out women, and you're so frightened of them that you're absolutely their slave. Your mind is shaped by the thing you want to exclude. You've shut yourself up with books, and you never know whether you believe in them or not. You are certain now that the whole business is a plant on humanity. You've worried about ideas, and you haven't one left. You mistrust it before ever it's born. You think and you don't believe in thinking. The only thing solid you've got left is a mad desire to keep women out of it. What the devil have you got left?"

He banged his fist on the table, and the noise re-echoing round his room awoke him to his attempt at self-deception. He could no longer keep the silence away: it thrust to his heart. He bowed his head upon the table and sobbed, "I'm too lonely . . . I can't . . . I can't. . . ." Slowly he raised himself. He grimaced at himself in the mirror above his mantelpiece, and was chilled by the despair in his own face; he moved round to the window with the indeterminate idea of making sure that there was something outside.

The lights on a barge crawled along the embankment edge silently, touched by tremulous blades of light from the lamps on the other bank, where the trams moved in and out of the black arms of the trees. He listened to each distinct stroke from a clock, and wondered why it stopped. A frozen shiver passed through him. It was useless to look out upon a dead waste where nothing was warm with welcome for him; yet he dared not turn round. He flattened his nose against the panes and shut his eyes; then holding himself rigid and upright, suddenly he turned about as he had learned as a school cadet, counting the movements, one, two, three. "That's all right," he said.



"Four." He opened his eyes. His room was the same. In banging the table, he had scattered a few sheets of paper on the floor. "Why didn't I learn drill for this?" he said as he began to pick them up, ceremonially, one by one. "Drill, that's what I want. Something to do because you have to, without worrying what it means, or whether there's a better way." He got on to his feet again. Then, with profound conviction: "Yes, that's a good idea. Why on earth don't people make a drill for life, to keep you from thinking about it? . . . Oh, but people do have drill, offices and families and police regulations. . . . Why on earth don't I go to an office all day? . . . It wouldn't be any good, though, I'll see through the drill. . . . It would only suit me sometimes—just now." He was disappointed as a child with an engine that will not work; but pleased with the success of his manoeuvre at the window. The engine certainly would run sometimes. A rap at the door did not startle him at all.

"A letter for you, sir, and I was to remind you that you had to go out to dinner this evening. I've brought the hot water."

He did not like the look of the letter. It was in his mother's handwriting. It was sure to be an accusation or reproach; he never had any other kind of letter. He put it into a book that lay on the table, for by experience he knew that there was no more likely way to forget it completely. The engagement to dinner with Cradock cheered him with the idea that he would be opposite to human beings during the evening and attending to their conversation; besides, he would now be preoccupied with getting ready and finding his way to Kensington. He made his preparations with care, knowing the misery which oppressed him when he was conscious of being badly dressed. He talked to himself incessantly, pausing between each separate remark.

"I wonder what it would be like to be Cradock for a month or two. . . . It must be rather fine to be a dramatic

critic . . . especially if you are one of the Cradock kind. . . . He knows exactly what a play should be, and never has any misgivings about his competence, never thinks why the devil do people write plays, and why the devil does he get paid for saying whether they are good or bad. . . . It's quite impossible to bring off a rear attack on him. . . . You can blow him into smithereens, but he doesn't know anything about it. . . . He's serious as though a pair of full-blown dramatic critics came out of the Ark. . . . Of course he wins : he knows what he's in the business for, pays his taxes, dreams of Aristotle, and is awfully decent to me. . . . Yes, I should like to be Cradock."

By the time he was brushing his overcoat, Maurice conceived the Cradocks' house in South Kensington as a secure Elysium, and was happy that he was going there. Considerations of Cradock comfortably accompanied him through the bewildering railways, without his having satisfied his curiosity concerning the problem how a Cradock begins to be a Cradock, and why if he were to put fundamental questions to Cradock with transparent clearness, Cradock would be sure to laugh at them as amusing and ridiculous imaginations. Yet though Cradock laughed and he was convinced that Cradock was very stupid, he never felt angry with him. He liked going to see Cradock in his office when he was there, and enjoyed lunching with him, because he spread an indescribable kindly warmth about. Maurice solemnly classified his acquaintances by the new standard, "Do I like him or him as much as Cradock?" and decided, not without doubts, that Dennis Beauchamp was the only one who could stand the test, because Dennis always understood at the point where Cradock would have laughed. He was doubtful about the matter, because he was not wholly sure that he preferred being understood to being laughed at in Cradock's way. It was hard to choose between being considered a curious man by Dennis and a curious child by Cradock. Dennis gave him responsibilities, Cradock comforted him with a



tolerant warmth. He had not remembered before that they would be together to-night, nor that this was the first time he had ever visited Cradock in his home. The anticipated pleasure excited him, and he was grateful to Cradock for having invited Dennis and himself. "Just like him."

He swung the gate to, finding pleasure in the noise he made. The green and white of the house-front pleased him. It was clean and cool and very honest. He remembered just in time to prevent himself from giving the polished bell-handle a violent tug.

He was almost ashamed of the enthusiasm with which he shook Cradock's hand, and had it not been for a sense of well-being which made him take particular delight in the soft tread of the carpet, the clean comfort of the arm-chairs, and above all in the unobtrusive warmth of Cradock's greeting, shame at his own exuberance would have shadowed him during the evening. Leaning back lazily in a chair he enjoyed his own sense of safety, as he watched Cradock's tall broad form move out of the room, and for some seconds the meaning of the words "My wife will be down in a minute" did not reach him. When he did understand them, his first and ordinary impulse to speculate what manner of woman Mrs. Cradock was, and to deduce her from the arrangement of the room was quickly spent, absorbed by his pervading indolence. Nevertheless he sought to excuse his own inactivity. "The room hasn't got any personality; it's just comfortable. There must be thousands like it. Next door is probably the same, outside and in." The bell tinkled far away; and muffled voices reached to him. "It can't be Dennis. There are two of them."

Soon after, Cradock ushered in a tall man, who might have been a colonel, and his wife, a small slim woman dressed in a new Early-Victorian fashion, who was rapturously appreciating a drawing by the door, before she noticed Maurice's presence. The words, "Mrs. Fortescue.

... Mr. Fortescue ...” cut in upon his reflection that he knew nothing about colonels after all, that *Mr.* Fortescue sounded as well as Colonel Fortescue, that perhaps neither of them knew the mediæval pun which served them as a motto. He pulled himself together enough to realise that he was waiting for Mrs. Fortescue to speak.

“I love this really modern art. Don’t you, Mr. Temple?” She pointed vaguely with her fan towards the picture, as though to show that the introduction had been no more than a momentary interruption in the sequence of her thought. “It’s so alive. It’s quite a mental tonic.”

“Yes. . . .” Maurice was insisting upon her first question, though she expected no answer. He felt that he must crystallise his dispersed faculties upon this conversation. . . . “But I’m not quite sure that I know what modern art is.” He must gather himself together, even if he had to be ponderous. “I suppose the really modern art is good because it attaches to some tradition, after all. Or do you think the tonic quality is something quite new?”

“Oh, you’re too deep,”—Mrs. Fortescue had immediately conceived a dislike for him for his suggested opposition, and was trying to cover her aversion by playfulness. “I never think about things,—at any rate, not in that way. I mean that I never took any interest in pictures before these modern artists began to do these things. Now I’m absorbed. Besides I know quite a lot of them. They are so interesting when they tell you about their ideas; it gives you a feeling that you are mixed up in what is being done.”

“Yes . . . I suppose it does. . . . I don’t know very much about it. But what are their ideas?” Maurice felt that he would enjoy being hated by her for trying to make her ridiculous to herself. “I’m really interested.”

“Oh, colour.” She halted a minute, then ran smoothly into a remembered phrase. “The world is self-conscious and afraid of its own impulses. Modern art is the outcome

of a desire to bring back colour as a source of pleasure in itself."

"Oh, a return to the savages."

"Exactly." She was secure now, having received her cue. "It is ridiculous to imagine we are superior to savages in everything. We're effete. The only thing to do is to go back to the primitive, uncontrolled people. They're splendid, unconscious. . . ."

Maurice wanted to continue; but suddenly he had a vision of himself and Mrs. Fortescue, Cradock and Mr. Fortescue, arranged mathematically at the corners of a square, one diagonal for the combatants, the other for the spectators. It was absurd.

"Well, it doesn't go well with the furniture," said Mr. Fortescue.

Mrs. Fortescue made an impatient movement of her head, but smiled to show that her husband amused her.

Maurice seized the opening. "No," he said seriously. "I suppose it is difficult to find suitable stuff."

"Besides," said Mr. Fortescue, "even if you could, I hate being glared at by a picture. It may be all right for women. They can dress up to it. We can't."

"That's true," said Maurice. "After all, it's taken a long while to get where we have, and we can't suddenly go back on it. Our furniture shows the way we've gone during the last three hundred years; and if our pictures won't go with our furniture, it only shows that there's something wrong with the pictures."

Maurice was pleased with the argument, for he knew it was irritating Mrs. Fortescue. He was yet more pleased with the approval of her husband, for that irritated her yet more.

"It's all right in moderation." Cradock, as ever, was pronouncing the award. "It's been a good protest against dullness, at any rate. I think it has accomplished something of its own too." The bell was tinkling again. "Any-



how," said Cradock, as he moved towards the door, "I've bought some of them."

Mrs. Fortescue was not satisfied. Desiring completely to vindicate herself, she was explaining to Maurice that it was impossible to judge really modern pictures apart from their appropriate setting. "The modern idea isn't merely a matter of hanging a picture on a wall. The modern picture is part of a larger scheme of decoration."

Somebody was laughing in the hall. Even Mrs. Fortescue stopped to listen. Maurice was relieved. "That's Cradock," he said to himself, "laughing at Dennis's face." He was himself never sure whether Dennis's lugubrious expression on entering a room was assumed or natural; nor could he make up his mind on this occasion when he saw him come slowly, blinking, into the room. Maurice was impatient while the introductions were made, even slightly annoyed that the Fortescues should claim Dennis's attention for a moment while he was in the room. He wondered whether Dennis felt the same. "I suppose not. That would be too much to expect." Yet he was vaguely disappointed as he stretched out both his hands, nor was he wholly reassured by the smile he saw in Dennis's eyes.

He had no time to ask him what he had been doing all day before the door once more opened and Mrs. Cradock entered. He saw Cradock take a tremendous stride to the door to hold it open for her, and for the moment Mrs. Cradock was merged in the evident delight which Cradock took in serving her. Maurice was pleased that he alone noticed the pretence by which she turned as though to shut the door herself, and thus placed her hand on her husband's; and then he turned to look at Cradock, who watched his wife greeting the Fortescues with an obvious pride. It was fine that two people should be so much in love, even though they had been married years and years; it proved Cradock must be a wonderful man. Maurice could not prevent a touch of envy creeping into his admiration, as he shook hands with Mrs. Cradock and re-

marked that she was not very pretty, at least not pretty like Mrs. Fortescue, than whom she was a little taller. More than this he thought that her eyes were very restful, and her hand was alive. "It wouldn't be so fine if she were pretty," he said to himself.

Dennis was asking him what he thought of a book. Maurice tried to tell him while they descended together to dinner.

During dinner Cradock and his wife took infinite delight in cross-examining Dennis, who was on the staff of a hospital, concerning the fortune he was making; and Dennis grimly talked of the enormous incomes successful doctors earned. Mrs. Fortescue, who had been certain that he was a writer, was prevented by her new knowledge from taking any interest in the conversation; Mrs. Cradock after an abortive attempt to rouse her, applied herself the more intently to probing Dennis's mind. For a long while Maurice entered into the game with absorption, making exaggerated statements concerning a house-surgeon's fees, immensely satisfied that Mrs. Cradock made no vain attempts to interest Mrs. Fortescue.

"What do you really believe in, Mr. Beauchamp?" Mrs. Cradock asked Dennis.

"Nothing at all." Unconsciously he beamed, then recollecting the nature of his reply, looked depressed. "Nothing at all."

"But you must believe in the good of sawing people's legs off; you do it so well."

"My dear Mrs. Cradock," there was an expostulatory roll in his voice, "it's precisely because I don't believe in it that I do it at all well. If I did believe in it, I might be enthusiastic and lose my head in a man's stomach. As it is, I consider it is all worthless, keep perfectly indifferent, and don't kill more than one in six."

Mrs. Fortescue felt that Dennis was ordinary and vulgar.

"That won't do, Dennis," pursued Mrs. Cradock. "Will

it, Jim ? ” She turned to her husband. “ You must have a reason for doing doctor’s work rather than any other ; no, perhaps you haven’t. But you must have one for doing work at all ? ”

“ Well, I must earn my living.” He nearly believed it.

“ Come, you know you don’t need to.”

Mrs. Fortescue glanced with new interest at Dennis.

“ Oh, it’s something to hang on to. I know what I have to do for eight hours of the day—or the night. I have to sleep another eight—if I get them. And eight hours’ introspection is just not enough to paralyse me. If they gave me seven hours’ work a day instead, the Lord alone knows what might happen.”

“ I am certain he has ideals,” broke in Maurice, “ of perfect operations, of appendices cut out with one sweep of the knife, and an indestructible digestive apparatus in silver. . . .” He suddenly stopped. Dennis was protesting. Nobody had noticed anything. Maurice knew that he had nothing to say, that what he had said was cheap and that Dennis recognised it, and he wanted to find out what was the matter with himself. He had spoken because he had wanted to share Mrs. Cradock’s conversation, and to hear her address him as Mr. Temple. It was not that she was charming, or that her eyes were kindly and profound, for he could hardly see them in the shade ; but rather that in her voice and in her manner of handling Dennis there was the suggestion that she was sure of herself, that there was in her mind something achieved that maintained her and allowed her to judge securely. Maurice felt that if he could attract her attention and hold it he would feel an access of strength, the knowledge that he was worth something. The idea began to dominate him while he watched her surely and swiftly forcing Dennis to confess that he did believe in something. He saw that Dennis too was anxious to justify himself to her : he heard Dennis confess that always he was certain of one thing, that he believed in poetry ; he heard him break into some verses



of Shelley as though it were the most natural thing in the world. He was following the impulse of Dennis's mind as though it was his own. It was his own. He wanted to speak in his defence, to prove to Mrs. Cradock that there was something in him.

At the sound of the poetry Mrs. Fortescue looked towards her husband, and the lift of her eyebrow was by ever so little extravagant. Maurice caught the glance, and thought that he just stopped himself from saying "Damn you." He wondered what had come over the dinner-party. He could not look at Mrs. Fortescue, for he loathed her, or her husband, who he knew was trying to look as though he was accustomed to such things, or at Dennis, for now his sympathy had changed to a burning jealousy, or at Mrs. Cradock, for fear that he would call out to her: "Please let me speak"; so he stared intently at Cradock, and was thankful that he was still absorbed in contemplation of his wife, or at least still regarding her every movement. Perhaps it was all ridiculous after all. Dennis was still reciting poetry. Maurice was sure he was making a fool of himself, that the poetry would go on and on for ever. Oh, why didn't he stop? Someone would laugh and then he would go mad. He would laugh himself. "For God's sake don't laugh, don't. . . ." He bit his lips, for he might cry or laugh aloud. Everything was perfectly still. Nothing had ever been alive. "Don't laugh. . . . Oh, God . . . don't laugh. . . ." Dennis's lips were not moving at all. Yet he heard a sound, equable, monotonous, eternal. A line slowly printed on his brain:

"The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Something in him seemed to crack with the sound of falling glass. He was standing up trying to wipe the wine that was spilled over the cloth. He heard himself making far-off excuses as he left the room.

He held the bannisters, saying weakly to himself, "No, I'm not often like that. . . . Yes, that was a sonnet. . . ."

*Ozymandias*. . . . It did take a long while. . . .” He could nothing do but laugh feebly, even while he bathed himself in cold water. Plunging his face in the basin, he was laughing still, and wondering whether it would be very different if he never moved. In a moment he was quite calm, not even caring to think how it had all happened. He heard a door open, and kept perfectly still, curious to know what the voices were saying. It was Cradock and his wife.

“Poor chap,” he heard the low-pitched words of Cradock. “I’ve never known him like that before. Perhaps the room was too hot.”

“Perhaps,” came the whispered answer, “but I don’t think it was that. I hope he’s not ill. He’s a nice boy. Where is he though? I can’t hear anything. . . .”

Maurice rattled the door, and stamped about so that they should hear him. He plunged his face in the water again and heaved a long sigh of relief “Ha-a-a” as he withdrew it, splashing, to let them know that he was all right again. The door of the dining-room opened and shut very quietly. Mrs. Cradock had returned to the table. Then came a knock at the bathroom door, and Cradock’s kindly voice.

“Are you all right? Nothing serious, I hope?”

“Nothing at all. I am quite fit,” he sang out, cheerfully. Then, opening the door, and laying his hand on Cradock’s arm. “I’m very sorry. I don’t know what it was. I’ve been like it once before.” He knew that was a lie; but he felt happy with “He’s a nice boy” sounding insistently in his ears, and he did not want to worry anybody with the idea that he had been really ill. As they entered the room, Mrs. Cradock and Mrs. Fortescue were about to leave, and in the general motion and the hurried answers to sympathetic enquiries, Maurice found himself in his chair, leaning forward as though nothing had happened.

He tried to say to Dennis that he was sorry for being such a fool, but he saw in Dennis’s face that he had been



anxious and disturbed. Therefore Maurice merely smiled energetically. Mr. Fortescue was a little afraid of him, and told what must have been a long-familiar story of Jesus under Jelks with less than what must have been his usual ease. Then Cradock asked Dennis his opinion concerning a play, and Maurice purposely returned to the safe subject of English furniture, for he was anxious, for some unknown reason, to vindicate his complete sanity to Mr. Fortescue. Nevertheless the atmosphere was still constrained as they rose to go to the drawing-room.

Maurice would have given anything to know what Mrs. Cradock and Mrs. Fortescue had said about him. They must have talked about him, and he was sure that Mrs. Fortescue had led off the attack, and equally he felt sure that Mrs. Cradock had defended him. Only he wanted to know exactly the words she had used about him : he did not even care whether she had meant them, or whether, as was probable, she had praised him only because Mrs. Fortescue referred to him slightly. Sincere or not, the fundamental intention was the same. She had defended him against an enemy, and he knew he was safe with her. All that he wanted was the very words, so that he could use them to comfort himself, saying them to himself in her voice. That was impossible ; but he was happy.

### CHAPTER III

MAURICE felt even careless as he stood by the fire and watched, a little remotely, the faces in front of him, Dennis being made wretched by Mrs. Fortescue's incessant questions concerning his prospects and his aristocratic friends, Mr. Fortescue still inclined to resent having been brought into such incalculable company, Cradock not able wholly to conceal his pleasure that his wife was dominating, not tyrannically, the whole party, and Mrs. Cradock calm and restful, but perhaps still rather concerned about himself, Maurice. It was some seconds before he realised that Mrs. Fortescue was again stridently concerned with modern art.

"It's such a refreshing change from what we've been used to. I think the idea that all the young men should suddenly find themselves perfectly free from the terrible influence of tradition is wonderful. It means that we shan't have any more foolish attempts to carve Greek heads, and that alone will be a relief, won't it?"

No one made any haste to answer, and she continued: "For my part, I never could see anything in them; but only nowadays I can dare to say that openly. One doesn't need to have any excuse for not liking the National Gallery or the British Museum."

"But perhaps you're only waiting for some new modern art to turn up, to say that you don't really like this?" said Dennis, quietly malevolent. "But, honestly, I don't pretend to know anything about these things."

"No?" said Mrs. Fortescue, icily.

Dennis was quelled and silent, realising it was hopeless to put up a fight with the woman on her own ground. He

turned eagerly to Mrs. Cradock who was addressing Mrs. Fortescue, and he wondered whether the gentleness of her tone was purely cynical.

"I don't know how it is," she said, "but I really do get something out of those statues, you know. I feel very calm and quiet in front of them. All I know about modern art is that I don't generally feel like that in front of it, and it seems to me that unless I can feel that it isn't art . . . of course, that only means it isn't what I want."

As soon as he heard Mrs. Cradock's voice, Maurice was eager to join the conversation; he felt that he was bursting with things to say to an understanding mind. "I think I know what you mean, Mrs. Cradock," he said with an effort, abruptly. "Don't you feel that some of them have what they give to you?" His advance was headlong. "I mean, that their heads really have the same security which you feel in yourself. It's like a human sympathy suddenly established between two minds. You're conscious—at least I mean I am—that you lack something which really belongs to you by right, and those heads not only have it, but they can give it to you for a moment at least. Afterwards, you realise how far you fall short of the thing desired, and realise it far more painfully than before, but I don't think you regret it at all. I know I used to say that I only got that moment any security out of a work of art; but I'm not sure about that now. . . . I'm not sure about anything, you know." At the instant he thought that he had done a foolish thing. He had been hovering on the narrow edge between keen self-consciousness and the unconsciousness with which Mrs. Cradock's presence seemed always to threaten him. He had been talking to her, and he had made a confession to her alone. He did not want those cruel and idiot Fortescues to hear it. He was even blushing. Particular words that he had used seemed to quiver like a nerve exposed. "A work of art." He was being wounded again and again therein. He stared at the fender. It seemed a long while before Dennis took

him up, and while Dennis spoke, he gradually became interested and confident enough to raise his eyes. Mrs. Cradock was leaning back in her chair, gripping the arms rather tightly in her fingers, watching him as it might be anxiously. He wondered what she was anxious about.

"I think that's all right," said Dennis, "but what do you mean about getting the feeling of security from a work of art?" When Dennis had said the word, the bare nerve was covered again. "You mean you get it from other things? What are they?" Then, turning to Cradock sitting quietly in a chair, on the side of the fireplace opposite Maurice: "He's probably got something in the back of his mind he wants to get out. I know the symptoms." Cradock smiled, gently omniscient. "Let's have it, Temple."

"I think Mrs. Cradock knows more about it than I do. . . ."

She said nothing, but still looked at him, still anxiously. Mrs. Fortescue was plainly contemptuous, her husband bored.

"... Besides, in any case, I am hopeless at explaining things." He shifted nervously against the mantelpiece. "But what I'm after is that the thing you get out of one of these Greek heads, that affects you most profoundly, isn't so much anything actually in the art as the thing that the art seems to assume and allow for. You may call them beautiful if you like, but whatever that beauty may be, it's not the thing that hits you. . . ."

"That's exactly the idea of modern art, if you really look into it," said Mrs. Fortescue.

"I don't know. Perhaps it is, only I haven't seen it. Perhaps, too, what we call beauty has to be there before you can realise anything of what the artist assumes and allows for. At any rate, I've never had it without the thing we call beauty.

"What I mean is some state of the mind which is expressed in the way the face is carved. It's generally called repose, or calm, or dignity. You feel that you might have



a *face* like that and yet be worried to death about where you were going to get the money for to-morrow's dinner ; but if you had a *mind* like that you never could be concerned about those things. You would never be at the mercy of life, because you would know what it all meant. Not that that's anything of a discovery, because you can, if you really look, see it behind most things that are written about these statues. But people seem to confuse it all very quickly by talking about the divine, and saying that after all they are statues of gods, or at best they are portraits of idealised men. To me the important thing is not that they are gods or idealised men, but just men—if you like, men in a state of grace, but for all that men, and the spirit that they have in them is a human spirit. The strange thing about it is that we recognise that it is quite different from our own, and yet it is our own. We haven't got it, but we believe we could have it, and that we were meant to have it ; and that if we had it we shouldn't be contemptuous of other men who don't think the same things as we do and are not concerned with the same ideals, but we should just accept them. For the only reason why we're contemptuous of other people, at any rate I know the only reason why I am, is that I'm not at all sure of myself.

“Contempt is a kind of rotten foundation on which we build a little tin temple where we bow down to our valuable selves. We have to endow it with a lot of spurious sanctities before we can deceive ourselves into worshipping there for a moment, and the first of these sanctities is to convince ourselves that we're somehow different from the rest. Of course it's true that we are, but that's not the important thing. The important thing is that we're the same, only perhaps pushed to a higher degree. The idea of contempt is that the difference is in kind, and once you've really got that idea working inside them, it seems to me you're condemned not merely never to understand but to make what you want to understand utterly unintelligible. You're warped from the very beginning.

“The heads, on the other hand, have something different and the same; and the thing that they have is security in the soul. I call it harmony in the soul, because I learned the phrase somewhere before I had any notion what it meant, and it has always appealed to me. That is what the people who carved them assumed and allowed for. You can’t carve a harmony in the soul, but you can believe in it and leave room for it, so that other people can feel it. And just because it is a quality of the soul, you can surely get it elsewhere than in a work of art—you can get it from people who have it when you meet them. . . .

“Although it may take time for you to realise that you need it, and that it is the thing you’re working for, once you have met it you know. I know that I need it, and I know that one way to get it is to be in the presence of a person who has something of it. My life is always tormented by its insecurity, and there’s no doubt that I forget all about that, at least when I’m faced with security. And so I seem to spend all my time looking for someone who has got to it. And just because I can do that, and not feel that the whole idea is all wrong, I know that there’s something in a Greek statue, and in a great many other things, that isn’t in this modern stuff, and what that is, and why it’s in one and not in the other, I think I know. It’s because the true artist does realise what the harmony in the soul may be, and because we realise that it really belongs to us, and that we should be safe, if we could only get to it. . . .”

Maurice was tingling at his own outburst. He had gone too far to feel ashamed. No one spoke. For ages no one spoke. Then Mrs. Cradock said :

“I think that’s quite true.”

“It’s very mystical, certainly,” said Mrs. Fortescue.

“Perhaps only rather enthusiastic,” said Cradock.

“But you don’t tell us how to get to the harmony, Morry,” said Dennis; “and though I think I could believe in everything you’ve said, that’s important enough, isn’t it? Or is it enough to find it in somebody else and ex-

perience it that way ? Or do you mean that some people are born with it, and others only see it for moments, and that they have just to keep as many of these moments as they can ? ”

“ I don’t know. I don’t see how I could know. After all it is a matter of your own experience. Anyhow, it’s a personal business.”

Maurice was closing up again. He had begun inwardly to shiver as a creeping cold closed in about him after excited heat. He hoped that some ordinary topic would be discussed, so that there should be no chance of bursting out again. Mrs. Cradock commenced to talk about Italy where he had never been, and he had a comfortable leisure in which to convince himself of Mrs. Fortescue’s foolishness in listening to her remarks about Umbria. Dennis and Cradock were talking about a play. Cradock was being benignantly firm about the merits of certain actors.

“ Hapwell’s really no good, you know. No actor’s any good unless he’s enough in him to make him unconscious of his own personality. The trouble is that according to the modern system, reputation is built only by the actor’s emphasis on his individuality. He begins to command his own particular salary when he is credited with his own particular manner. Not that there’s any room for anything else in the best plays we can produce nowadays.” He turned round towards his wife. “ Anne, what was it you said the other evening about Shaw . . . ? It was something very good,” he added to Dennis.

Mrs. Cradock smiled at him almost mechanically. The smile had nothing to do with what she was thinking, and was as though the thinnest surface of deep water had been moved.

“ Oh, I’ve forgotten now,” she said. “ It wasn’t anything important, though. . . . I love the plain from Assisi, the way those blue hills fold on each other at the far edge.” She wondered whether she had been the cause of Maurice’s words, and whether they had really been, as she



felt they had been, addressed to her. She was sure of it. At first she felt that every one else must have noticed it, and she glanced at her husband who was leaning forwards towards Dennis. She heard him say : " It was awfully good, though, something about the axiom of all drama being the freedom of the spirit. . . ." Suddenly Cradock turned round as though to ask her more. Their glances met and she smiled, and Cradock turned away, having forgotten to ask his question. She felt guilty in having smiled. She was deceiving Cradock in smiling at him while she thought about Temple. Yet she was very glad that Maurice had really been speaking to her, and her happiness doubly armed her against the darts of Mrs. Fortescue.

" You're quite *distract*, Mrs. Cradock, you must be very tired."

" No, thank you. Really I couldn't help listening to Jim and Mr. Beauchamp. They're quite incorrigible when they begin on the theatre."

Cradock's large and rather heavy face flushed with pleasure. He was always like a big child with his wife, glad whenever he felt that she was taking some notice of him, which was often enough, because she knew his nature and indulged it, not without a certain naïve delight in her own conscious power.

But the Fortescues were incessant in attack. Even Mr. Fortescue was momentarily diverted from his ruminations to hazard a remark about Italian railways. Mrs. Cradock's skill in reply was consummate, because she was aware that her mind was really working apart, trying to answer the inexorable question : " Is my soul secure ? " Indubitably Maurice believed that he had seen a security in her, and she was troubled with anxiety to satisfy herself that this was really true. She did not dare to answer the question, because she might have to say " no." She tried to rid herself of it by treating the whole matter as unreal and fanciful, suggested by an enthusiastic boy's random rhetoric.



Yet she could not deny that she was glad that she had inspired it, even while she resented his monopoly of her mind. She turned towards him.

He was now sitting down, leaning forward as though to listen to the conversation of Dennis and Cradock, his elbows resting upon his knees and his face in his hands, nervously biting at his fingers. She saw immediately how agitated he was, and knew that he was not really listening to the words in which he pretended to be absorbed. The impulse to reassure him suddenly took hold of her.

"You mustn't be too philosophical, Mr. Temple," she said quietly. He started, but the smile on her face instantly calmed him, and he too began to smile.

"Why?" he said.

"You should have more pity on yourself."

Mrs. Cradock turned away to *riposte* to some question of Mrs. Fortescue's, and Maurice found himself confronted with the amused eyes of Cradock, who had turned at the sound of his wife's voice.

"I hate Cradock's amusement," Maurice said to himself. "He doesn't understand anything, to treat me like a child." But his annoyance faded away. He was really only concerned with Mrs. Cradock's solicitude for him, and above all concerned with the expression of it. He thought there must be infinite subtleties in the words, for he seemed to taste something in them which stood in no intelligible relation to "you should have more pity on yourself." He was continually repeating the phrase to himself, finding it very precious.

The conversation had become general. Mrs. Fortescue, still apprehensive of Dennis's vulgarity, was calling him a mystic; while he, with perfect gravity, was asking her what she would feel if a sailor on the top of a motor omnibus should lean over and deliberately spit upon her head. Cradock laughed at the situation. Mrs. Fortescue, now convinced that Dennis was quite impossible, irritated by the calmness with which he polished his eyeglass, could

find no words to reply to what she felt could only be a personal insult.

"A sailor did it to me," said Dennis unmoved. "I think I was glad. I should have been, if I'd been sure that he did it deliberately, aiming at me and no one else. It would have meant that I was important to him. Anyhow, it's much more profound than one is inclined to think."

Mrs. Fortescue was indulging in a sugary "good-bye." "So delightful *and* unusual," she said. Maurice knew the shaft was meant for him, and though he was unrepentant about her, he felt again ashamed of himself for his behaviour.

"Good-bye, Mr. Temple," Mrs. Cradock was saying. "I hope we shall see you again soon. I shall think about what you said."

Maurice walked with Dennis along the High Street. Even though they came very near to understanding each other completely, he could never overcome a certain shyness with Dennis, so that he never took Dennis's arm of his own account. Dennis knew this, and to-night he took Maurice's as if it were perfectly normal between them. Maurice was grateful and happy in pressing Dennis's arm close, for he needed exactly this gesture of friendship that his sense of security should continue unbroken.

"I think that was all right about the soul," said Dennis as though he had been thinking of nothing else since. "I've met a man who can give you the feeling, though I've only spoken with him once or twice—a doctor who lives in Hampstead of all places. He doesn't talk much, hardly at all in fact; but he listens, and somehow you begin to let off about your soul. I remember the last time but one I talked for about half an hour without a break, and said some things that seemed to me extraordinarily deep; but I forgot about them. However, I met him once since, at a dinner, and he reminded me about something I'd said about spirit and necessity in society. I didn't understand it, but I thought I could feel something profound in it."

"I've never met anybody like it," said Maurice, "but I do believe in them." He felt that he couldn't go on, for he wanted to say that he had met someone like it that evening. It would be terrible to risk being misunderstood. After a pause he added, struggling for nonchalance, "I'm not sure, though, that Mrs. Cradock hasn't got something of it. But I suppose you would have to recognise it immediately."

"I don't know." Dennis was reflecting. "After all, it must have been something that set me off on the poetry, and you on to the soul. We're not in the habit of it at dinner parties, are we?"

Maurice found a warm delight in the "we" and laughed, remembering another dinner, where they had both sat silent, while a literary encyclopædist had wagged a portentous finger to mark the number of times that Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale* must be read by one who really wished to be conversant with literary art.

"No," he said, "I think she must have something of it anyhow."

"Still, I'm not sure about women," continued Dennis. "I often think that something like it is native to the best of them, but I'm never sure that it is the real thing. A woman, I mean, who is beautiful, is often splendidly sure of herself, almost on the animal plane. She seems to sun herself in life, as if she never had the slightest doubt about it. Probably she hasn't, either. And in a way she'd understand you, simply because she doesn't believe in worrying about the things you worry about, and most of the time you don't believe in it yourself, only you just have to go on. So she's always sure where we are doubtful."

"But that kind of security won't really satisfy, and it never does. After all, though a man may disbelieve in himself, and curse his own foolishness for worrying about what the whole thing means for three hundred and sixty-four days in the year, there will probably be the odd one when he sees something in it all, and believes his right to worry



in the way he does. If he were to meet the woman on that day he wouldn't think she was wonderful ; he would just think she was intolerable and blind. She seems to be certain and to have what you call the harmony, only because she cuts out all that a man considers to be his soul. And mind you, compared to him she is certain nearly all her life, but on his best day she will be unable to touch him, or to hold him at all.

"Not that I say that Mrs. Cradock is like that, for she seems different, and she seems to understand ; but I've a queer idea that that's what it might all reduce to in the end. You don't get harmony—that is, if we are meaning the same thing—by carving out all that part of a man which really tells him that he needs it, but by somehow getting beyond it, and of having something of your best day in every day of the year, or at any rate never feeling that you are cut off from it absolutely. Where the woman gets you is that for nearly all your life she can convince you that she has known the secrets of the universe from the day of her birth, and you have nothing to put up against it, except perhaps a certain amount of knowledge which you know doesn't count anyway."

"But, after all," said Maurice, "you can only judge it by its effects, surely. The fact that she managed to start us talking is something, isn't it ? You don't find that in every woman, do you ?"

"No, you don't. But perhaps the reason is that the majority of them don't know exactly where their strength is, and they try the foolish game of trying to meet you on your own ground—the intelligent interest in things. There it's just hopeless. Plenty of them are clever and intelligent, enough at least to make me feel uncommonly incompetent. But my sense of inferiority doesn't last long. There's too much perfection in their cleverness and intelligence. It hasn't got any loose ends, and the reason is that they're not trying to get anything out of it all. If they were, it wouldn't be so complete, simply because it couldn't



be. Their idea in being intelligent is to prove themselves superior to most men, and that's not very hard after all, and it probably doesn't need to be proved. A great many men are like that ; but the best of them are intelligent, not because they think it's a good thing to be intelligent, but because it's a bad way, but the best that they've got, to get hold of something that will make them believe in life. A woman doesn't need to believe in it, and she really doesn't care about anything outside her emotions. If she stays on that ground she's impregnable—except on the one day in the year."

The theory was interesting enough, thought Maurice, but it didn't fit the new fact. However, he kept that remark to himself, and they walked on, without saying anything, to the station where they stopped to say "good-bye."

"You know a good deal more about these things than I do," said Dennis, "but I think those very Greeks who, you say, managed to conceive this harmony and express it, rather left women out of it, didn't they ? "

"I believe they did, now you remind me."

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye. I suppose I shall be seeing you again soon."

Maurice had something to occupy him on his journey home. He was not wondering about his feelings, as he generally did, but he took an instinctive delight in recreating certain scenes of the evening. He did not have to exert himself very much, for the whole episode seemed to resolve itself into one or two pictures in which he could see himself plainly, one where he was tilting back his chair and nervously watching Cradock's face as though his life depended on his not turning to Mrs. Cradock, while she listened to Dennis's poetry. Though he was not looking at her he saw her plainly, her arms leant on the table, draped in some greyish gauze, her eyes smiling a little, yet intent upon Dennis, and again he wanted to call out to her that she must look at him and speak to him. In the other, he

was leaning anxiously against the mantelpiece, talking rapidly, while Mrs. Cradock leaned back in her chair and looked at him, a little apprehensive; she was gripping the arms of her chair very tightly as though to stifle something in herself, yet her eyes were smiling at him. He wondered why she was so anxious, and what she was trying to control.

## CHAPTER IV

"GORGEOUS morning, Anne." Cradock entered the breakfast-room as though he were taking a fence. His vigour was not particularly due to the morning sun, which shone through the windows on this late March morning. A forcible radiation of physical energy at the breakfast-table was habitual with him. When his wife was there before him as to-day, she became apprehensive of the brusqueness of his entrance, and would wait nervously for the sound of his heavy descent of the stairs, three at a time. This morning she had waited in suspense. At his entrance she started and recovered herself.

"It is good," she said, with a trace of emphasis, of which she alone was aware. "You look very fit, Jim."

"Do I?" He laughed and reddened, as a schoolboy embarrassed and being told that he is quite a man. "Well, I feel fit, anyhow. Nothing could touch me on a morning like this—except perhaps being kept off my food. I'm going for a walk somewhere. You should too. The morning's made for it." It was no question of their going together, for by old experience they knew that the task of keeping pace with Cradock's energetic stride was too much for his wife, while he felt irked and miserable when he reduced his pace to hers. Besides, Mrs. Cradock liked to go out alone.

"Perhaps I shall," she said.

The sunlight was not without its effect upon him. "Perhaps we might go together as far as the Park corner," he said. "It's good to dawdle a bit in the sun."

She smiled a little at the way he referred to any walk together. "Well, we'll see." There was a pause, during

which she leant forward on her elbows, and watched him at his breakfast, waiting for his next words.

"How d'you like the boy Temple? You went to bed so quickly last night, I didn't have time to ask you. They made a queer party. The two of them quite put the Fortescues out of their bearings. But I enjoyed it."

"So did I."

"He's a quaint child, though. I've never known him go funny like that before. I sometimes wonder whether he looks after himself. He often rattles away a good deal when he comes to see me at the office. But I've never known him take things so seriously as he did last night. Perhaps it's the combination of him and Beauchamp. They're always talking together. Anyhow, he's very young."

"Yes. . . . What does he do?"

"To tell the truth, I don't quite know. He sometimes reviews a book for us, but very seldom. I don't know that he does anything. Sometimes he tutors people—lordlings. I think he's quite a good scholar. Once I believe he told me he was going in for an examination for some Museum. At all events he doesn't do very much. I don't think he quite knows what he's up to. But he's only a youngster, after all."

"Yes, he is very young. So young, that you can't have really any opinion about him. His philosophy is very much the same thing as poetry in other young men,—just a symptom of their age. But I like him because he takes himself so seriously, and yet he's not offensive. I never saw a boy so intensely ashamed of himself as he was after his speech. I like him for that."

"I didn't notice it, though."

"You wouldn't, would you, Jim? Own to it. It's hardly your *forte* to notice people's feelings, is it?"

"I suppose you're right. But I don't see why."

"Well, do you know what my feelings are now? Have you the faintest idea of what I am really thinking?"



"You're too deep." Cradock was undecided between seriousness and a smile. "But I don't believe you're really thinking of anything in particular—except perhaps what you'll wear when you go out this morning."

Mrs. Cradock looked at him hard for a second, then her lips laughed amusedly.

"Oh, Jim. You're altogether too obvious, my darling. I think I should be better doing the theatres myself; don't you, now?"

"I'm sure you would."

"If only you believed it. . . . You're very simple, Jim,—not a day older than when you came down from Oxford. Women—well there are just sheep and goats. And a good solid thing it was to start your first-nighting with. It's lasted well too. . . . Only I do wish you would tell me, just once, whether I'm a sheep or a goat. We'll take it for granted that I'm a woman."

"Not a bit of use teasing me, Anne. You're really quite proud of me, but you don't like to show it. You know that I understand you. That's why you won't give up the mystery of the *femme incomprise*."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were right. Sometimes you're very profound—for a blockhead. But what I was going to ask was—Do you think Mr. Temple will ever be any older? Is he meant to grow up or not?"

"Only got to fall in love." Cradock spoke of something incredibly simple, too evident for words. "I've told him so already, myself. He'd have a tremendous idyll with a milkmaid or a miller's daughter—full of passion—if he were only put in the way of it. I can see myself sitting at my desk and listening to raptures about celestial beauty."

"Looking forward to it already, in fact."

"So would you. Obviously he hasn't the least idea of what a woman is, really. I like to think of his eyes being opened." Cradock paused. "Not but what it frightens me a little. It's rather awful to think that he may very well run away with a servant or a chorus girl—any quite

impossible person. He might never get over it when he discovers that the happiness won't last for ever."

"I don't know. . . . But I should have thought that he was a great deal too worried about himself to tumble in like that."

"They're just the kind that do, my dear Anne. It's a commonplace. All great scientists marry their own cooks. Young ones and poets marry somebody else's. . . . But, seriously, it's these young men who have their eyes fixed on the heavenly kingdom, who fall into ditches in the earthly. It's only natural."

"Very likely. But I believe you've got some inside information. This young man has confided in you already? He's in love?"

"Not a bit of it. I was only giving you the fruit of my experience. But what makes you think he's in love?"

"I don't. As I said, I thought that you might have some practical reason for your theory. It's hardly one of your habits to theorise, is it?"

"Isn't it? . . . I believe you've got something up your sleeve."

"How could I have? . . . Oh, one of these feminine intuitions, you mean?"

Cradock nodded, smiling.

"Nothing, as far as I know," said Mrs. Cradock.

"If it was true, I'd like to know the woman."

"So would I."

"I hope, for his sake, she won't be quite too terrible."

Cradock rose from the table. He went round to the other side and regarded his wife with admiration. He had a habit of kissing her after meals. Before he did so, he said: "You're fine this morning, Anne. I think those gauzy things you're wearing are very good, very good indeed. A kind of wedding garment effect." Then he bent over her. She rose and stood close to him while they both looked out of the window on to the garden which lay between them and the road. Already a general green was

perceptible in the blackened wood of the hedge by the railings.

"I wonder if you are so clever as you make out," said Cradock, looking down at his wife's face.

"I wonder . . ." she said. "More so, if anything."

Anne Cradock sat in her bedroom looking at her face in the mirror. She was exhilarated by the conversation and the morning, and the sight of the blood which had mounted to her cheeks, and was now pulsing and fluttering there before her, made her very happy. She found it hard to stop looking at herself to see whether the blood had faded. She brought her face closer and closer to the glass until she could see the tiniest veins, and her colour seemed to be more broken. Then she laughed. "Oh, you are an absurdity!" she said. She began to feel that the remark was only half-convincing, and she was thinking about it still while she unfastened the dress she was wearing, but soon she decided it would be silly to go on thinking, because the excitement was too good to be destroyed, nor could she have subdued it. She was hunting among her dresses for something to wear. It was not because she did not like the white "wedding garment" which she had just taken off, but because she wanted something else. Soon she found a blouse that was made of some grey-mauve muslin, and she began to put it on, looking at herself very closely in the mirror as she fastened her collar, and talking to herself.

"I should like to know why you choose this?" she said.

"Because it's spring, yet it's not really spring. It only looks like a blue sky for a moment; but it's really grey."

"Anne, you're getting romantic; and rather a liar."

She looked at herself for quite a long while without speaking. Then quickly tip-toed to the door and turned the key, while her heart throbbed. Then she sat down in a chair in front of the long mirror and clasped one knee



above the other with her hands, looking at her shoes, and turning at moments to catch herself in her mirrored reflection. A knock sounded on the door, then Jim's voice: "Are you ready? We're going up to the Park together, aren't we?"

"Oh, it's hopeless, Jim. I've been writing a letter. I shall never be ready now. You'll have to go without me."

"Right! Mind you go out though. It's too good to miss. See you at dinner. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye. Take care of yourself."

She was excited by her own unexpectedness. She wondered why she had made the excuse to avoid going out with him the few hundred yards to the Park, and yet she knew that she had never for a moment intended to accompany him. Rocking to and fro on her chair she assured herself that she really preferred to be alone, because she could notice things to her heart's content without being incessantly moved on by Jim's eagerness for action, and that her reluctance was natural and usual. Moreover, she was glad to be alone and with her own thoughts that morning, and although she might enjoy playing with Jim's naive unconsciousness, it soon became wearisome. She was excited enough already, and already tired with excitement, but glad that the whole day was before her for her occupations. She would go out immediately. At the door she turned with the impulse to look at herself in the mirror once more, and as she turned she saw the sunlight spotting the floor of her room. "Yes, it's a wonderful day," she said to herself. She went to the mirror again. "I'm young enough," she said.

Mrs. Cradock ran downstairs, calling to the maid, with whom she nearly collided at the stair-foot, laughing. "Isn't it a splendid morning, Richardson?"

"Yes, m'm, the buds are quite out in the garden. . . . You called me?"

"I feel very happy. I never believe Spring can do it,



until it does." She had spoken to herself. "Oh! what nonsense. What was it I wanted? . . . oh, my bag. Have you seen it? I've left it about somewhere."

"I've not yet seen it, m'm. But the drawing-room hasn't been done yet. Perhaps it's there."

"Yes, it is, . . . I remember now. I had it yesterday evening. Thank you." She entered the drawing-room, and rescued her bag from the corner of her chair, then dropped into the chair and stared at the mantelpiece. The room was remote and very quiet. A little brass vase was lying on its side on the mantel-corner. No one had set it up again since Temple's agitated shoulder had knocked it over. She tapped with her fingers upon the arm of her chair, regarding it, and as she pulled herself to her feet again, "It's too much," she said.

Of the beauty of the day there could be no doubt. Mrs. Cradock was happy with the childish thought that it was all her own. One or two hard little balls of white cloud gravely rested high in the blue sky. A tree which stood between the church and the motor-car shop was filled with the voices of many birds. On the tall buildings men in white jackets were swinging in cradles, painting the stained and dirty surface, and the new colour gleamed and dazzled in the sun. She stood still for several minutes with her head bent back to watch a cradle gradually swing higher and higher until it reached the level of the chimney-pots. A man holding fast to the roof coping gingerly felt for the cradle with his foot, and cautiously lowered himself into it. Vaguely she speculated whether he would fall, and at length decided that it would be useless to wait, because they never do. She watched until she felt that everybody round must be looking at her to see whether she would ever lower her head again. She walked on quickly with her head bent so that no passer-by could see her until she reached the corner of the Park, when she dared to look at the road again.

The omnibuses were toy omnibuses, the motor-cars were toy motor-cars, and the people were for all the world tin soldiers or their brothers; everything seemed to be going very fast, while she looked upon it all from an immense distance above, as though it were a wonderful game spread out and set in motion for her delight. The feeling, for all its strangeness, was somehow familiar, and she cast about to discover what it had recalled to her mind. She had known the same smallness, the same brightness, and the same delight in her busy surroundings in foreign cities. Perhaps it was that the scene reminded her of Paris by its very arrangement of buildings and spaces, but, while she thought, she knew that this likeness was only accidental, although the same spring sun and the unwonted clearness of the air may have counted for something. But what she chiefly remembered of her delight in strange cities was the wonder of her sense of apartness, and the impregnable security in herself, when all the familiar things about her were suddenly foreign and unfamiliar, and she had nothing more to do than to indulge her curiosity in an agitated and slightly ridiculous life with which she had no real connection. Yes, she knew she was the same isolated and infinitely amused spectator of a little world of toys, and to-day the carelessness which had always been inseparable from that sensation had strong hold of her;—but after all, the Park Gate was a familiar place and the things that passed by it were familiar things. She would like to sit down and think a little.

Mrs. Cradock passed under the archway; and as she passed she was compelled to ask the policeman which was the way to the Marble Arch, although she knew it perfectly well. The policeman told her smiling. She felt she had been found out, and hurried away, until she reached a seat where the policeman could see her no more. Immediately she was tired with the intoxication of the spring air, and far too lazy to think, she said to herself. And she sat

still for a long time with her eyes closed, drowsily happy to feel that the blood was hurrying about in her veins and conscious only of her eager bodily existence. Even she clasped her hands together, knowing that they were already too hot, in order that she might feel the goodness of her own flesh. And she wondered why it should be improper for her to pass her hands down her legs and delight herself in the sense that they were firm and hard. "I really do belong to another world," she said, opening her eyes. "To-day, at any rate," she added.

This reminded her that she had really come to the seat to think why she believed the world was strange to-day. It was quite easy to understand a feeling like this when you were in Paris; because everything is different there;—the omnibuses look like trains on the Underground, the trains look as though they had been filled with chocolates, when they are clean; and the trams looked like nothing at all. But in London? Perhaps there was one day in the year when everything changes suddenly, and that one day was to-day, and to-day was the beginning of real Spring. It might very well be a matter of light and sun and nothing more. "Too thin," she said to herself, "at all events I've never noticed it before." She prodded the gravel with the point of her umbrella. "Besides that's exactly what Jim felt this morning."

The answer was final. If one thing seemed above all others certain to her that morning, it was that her excitement had nothing to do with his. Beyond that she would not go, suspecting that were she to be too exacting in her search she might discover something that would perturb her. A wind blew about her, and behind, some flower-leaves rustled against each other, and she turned to look at them, amused to find that they were so small. She realised that all her thinking was not doing very much good, although she had spent a very long time over it, but she refused to get up until she had decided upon what she was going to do next. "You really *want* someone



with you on these occasions," she said impersonally, "otherwise it's not very much fun doing *something*—though it's excellent to do nothing by yourself." However it was nearly lunch-time, she reflected, and it would take some time to get to a restaurant. With this immediate purpose to control her she rose and walked along to the Marble Arch, not so carelessly as she had entered the Park. Somehow she felt rather cold and depressed. She felt infinitely removed from the people round her, but she didn't delight in them any more. They seemed rather more giant than pigmy, after all. The sun was not so very warm, and the sky was cast with grey. "I was quite right about the blouse," she said as she ran up the stairs of an omnibus.

She was cheered by her own remark, and as she rode in the front seat she was buoyed up by her inward conviction that she was perfectly and appropriately dressed. She regarded her shoes with complaisance while she considered what would be good for lunch. But the imagination did not please her long. Lunch was quite unimportant, even annoying, for it wasted time. If only she knew what she could do afterwards. "You knew all along," she said to herself, and then she began to laugh impatiently, as though she had foolishly betrayed a confidence and was in haste to forget all about it.

Lunch was silly, intolerable. People she did not know stared at her, and she detested them. One or two whom she knew spoke to her and she detested them more fervently, because they robbed her of her secrecy, and revealed her hiding-place.

"Don't often see you here, Mrs. Cradock," said one assiduous young civil servant. "You always seem to be so busy. I suppose the Spring's hit you to-day. I think everybody's affected by it."

"I'm enjoying it," she said, gravely.

"So'm I. Besides I've managed to get off early for once in a way."



"So I see. I never remember to have seen you here after two o'clock before. I hope you enjoy yourself."

"You do remember things. . . . Are you doing anything this afternoon? If not, might I go with you somewhere? Theatre, pictures, anything—I should love to."

"Thanks, but I'm engaged already at three o'clock. I'm rather late now." She looked hurriedly at the clock and called loudly for the waiter, in order to be rid of Mr. Mortimer.

Mrs. Cradock was not very good at excuses, generally. She had a foolish way of falling into the most obvious invitation-traps, and a particularly foolish habit of sending palpably ridiculous telegrams at the last moment, and then, in an inevitable burst of self-accusation, following with all speed in person, and steering through the inevitable explanations, with an unexpected sang-froid. She knew therefore, that the engagement at three o'clock was not exactly an excuse, although it certainly was not a reality. "But I had decided to go there early this morning," she answered in her own defence. There was no way out of the dilemma. Either she had decided to go there early this morning, in which case she had been engaged in deceiving herself all the day; or she had never decided at all, and it was merely an excuse to get rid of Mr. Mortimer. Triumphant she rebutted her own logic. "I decided just on the spur of the moment, although the idea had been at the back of my mind all day. I thought in bed this morning I might go to the British Museum, but it depended. Now I have decided." She slowly counted out money from her purse.

"I'm complex," she said, "yes, that's it," while she gathered her belongings, smiling as she nodded to the acquaintances but lately detested. "It's interesting."

Walking quickly from the restaurant towards the Museum Mrs. Cradock tingled with an involuntary excitement. Neither the road to the Museum nor the Museum itself were very new, and she had made the same journey

at the same hour many times before ; but never with the same pulsing of excited apprehension. She had nothing more to expect than before. Indeed she was not one to be moved profoundly by anything in the Museum except that which she had made peculiarly her own like the room of the Elgin Marbles. It was so much her own that she felt intimate and careless among them, as though she were at home in her own room, and the acceptance of the Marbles into intimacy had begun many years before when she and some six other young ladies were regularly conducted thither by their college drawing-master to make meticulous copies of the Parthenon pediment. It may have been she felt differently towards them now, and that they had a more deeply potent relation to her, because the Elgin Room had become a sure refuge and her principal asylum. The Marbles always soothed her, and she liked to ascribe her quieting to a mysterious potency belonging to them alone, although truly she spent most of her time before them in thinking of her delightful drawing afternoons. Although there were always these delights to be expected from a visit to the room, they were old and familiar delights, to which she could look forward with the security of a moment's promised peace. Her blood ran no faster before them, but rather its motion was abated, and in the slow composing of her agitations, while she walked under the successive archways in the dark red walls, chiefly consisted their perpetual attraction. But to-day she was ascending the wide steps with stranger feelings. The nearer she approached the room the more agitated she was, and as she passed under the last doorway and saw the straight line of the familiar pediment stretching up and away from her, she felt faint and sick. She had had a dim belief that somehow everything would be changed to more magnificent, and there instead were the red walls and the yellow varnished seats, all as she remembered them, but now a little dirtier and more ordinary than her memory. She sat down upon a seat that was

hers by prescriptive right and stared at the "Three Fates," wondering if these things really had any influence upon her. She suspected that her words, spoken on the previous night, now so distant, were merely words. If there were any truth in them it could be proved now, for now if ever she felt the need of security and calm.

Then she laughed out loud, not caring if all the keepers in the whole Museum should apprehend her. "Sheer self-hypnotism," she said. She was a bad subject that day, and very rebellious, knowing that the attempt to compose herself forcibly was bound to fail. She looked about her fearfully, and then began to walk behind the pedestals, half to hide herself, half to search.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cradock," said Maurice.

She said, "Good afternoon," and scrutinised him closely from behind her veil. He looked whiter even than she felt, and she knew he was sick with joy and fear.

"How strange that we should meet. . . ."

"I came to see if what we said last night is really true, Mr. Temple."

"So did I." He looked on to the floor. "—What's the use of lying? I've been waiting here with the one idea that you might come. I can't say anything at all about it now, you see." He threw his head back and laughed. It was a curious melodramatic laugh, as of the hero about to kill himself. There seemed to be no relation between it and his words.

"Have you had any lunch, Mr. Temple? Jim—my husband—told me that you don't look after yourself. It's silly."

Maurice was slightly offended.

"Yes, thank you," he said precisely. "Besides, it will be tea-time soon."

"Did you say that you have been waiting here with the idea that I might come? Why, it's the merest chance that I did. I happened to be lunching out not far away, and it's one of my favourite resting-places."



"I felt sure it would be,—somehow—after last night," he added. "That's why I came."

"Do you seriously mean to say that you came here to see me?"

She felt suddenly that it was unfair to hide any longer behind her veil, yet she dared not put her veil up.

"Yes, I did," he said stubbornly. "I wanted to see you, and I didn't know how. Then I thought you might be here." He spoke hurriedly. "Then I felt sure of it, and I said to myself if she's there, then it will be all right, certain. So it was." He was staring at the shining grating beneath his feet, his hands in his pockets, tapping with one shoe. "Oh, I'm an awful fool."

"What will be all right, Mr. Temple? Do I get it too? I'm fond of good omens."

"Oh, don't you know? Don't you ever do it? Sometimes, if you get into bed before the clock strikes it's all right, and if you don't it's bad. Sometimes I have to take off my shirt in bed."

"What *do* you mean?" She had control of herself now and of the conversation. Then, as though recollecting herself, "I know. It's the same as always stepping on the crack between the paving stones. If you don't miss, everything's all right."

"Yes, that's it. It's just the same."

"So it's all right after all. I'm glad. I'd like to think you were going to have good luck."

He paused a moment. "But it's not only *me*, you know." He checked himself. "You must think I'm mad," he said simply.

"No, I don't, really. I'm every bit as mad myself. I know exactly what you mean. Besides, I'm glad to have met you here. But let's go and look at something."

"I'm no good to-day, Mrs. Cradock. I've been looking at things too long. They seem to wobble a bit in my eyes."

"I believe you've been waiting here a very long while. Didn't you see me when I came in at first?"



"Yes."

"Why didn't you speak to me, then?"

"I thought you were upset about something. Besides, I couldn't have walked up to you. I hadn't got the nerve then. It took a frightful lot of doing, afterwards."

She understood perfectly, yet she wanted to hear him explain.

"But you're not frightened of me, are you?"

"Oh, no. That's not it."

"What was it? Do tell me?"

"You can't explain it, really. I just hadn't got the nerve. It seemed so important, and I felt that I'd rather not try than mess everything up. You see, you might just have nodded and gone on. I don't know what I would have done then. Or you might not even have noticed me. I think that would have been better than the other. But I'm not telling you anything. You know what I mean, don't you?"

Mrs. Cradock nodded "Yes" very slowly.

"But still I did manage it, after all."

He smiled as though he expected her to acknowledge an achievement.

"Are you pleased?" she said instead.

"Oh, yes." He stopped suddenly. "At least, I don't know. I'm not sure. But are you? please tell me."

"Shall we go outside? It's rather stuffy in here, and it's a wonderful day outside. We're not looking out for harmonies very much, are we? Although they're what we really came for."

They moved together through the gallery, both treading bravely, even noisily, because they were fearful of their footsteps. Maurice, she saw, was nervous and restless, and she longed to put up her veil to reassure him, but she had not the courage. He, able to divine nothing from her expression and little from her voice, in which he seemed always to detect a note of raillery which frightened him, was so agitated and apprehensive that he made random

and incoherent remarks, and she made haste to answer as though she understood.

"We ought to be processional—through the doorways—just like an old temple—one after the other," he said.

"Yes, I always feel that. I have a great idea sometimes that I'm a priestess of Isis." She wondered whether "one after the other" meant that they were so to walk, or referred to the vista of doorways. "Isis, yes, that's me," she laughed. "I must have a degenerate mind. I don't know how many times I've looked at the women on the frieze with the robe and admired them, and yet I want to be something to do with Isis. I think I like a mystery in a woman. Too much transparence is insipid." She knew that she was talking foolishly to save him a little; but her words began to alarm her. She felt she dared to say nothing that was untrue, because she was being taken seriously in every word. "And yet I must be honest. Yes, I should be a poor Isis, when I come to think of it."

"Perhaps you would. I don't know. But you can't get away from the mystery altogether. I can't. The more honest I try to be the more I seem to deceive myself—and other people."

"I know what you mean. At least, I think I do. When I try to straighten myself out, there's always two of me. One's absolutely honest and callous, the other's just secret. The trouble is I don't quite believe in either of them. There, I'm being what Mrs. Fortescue would call a mystic. . . . That's what always happens. If I try to be honest I'm unintelligible."

"Oh, no, you're not. That's just it." He was eager in assent. They were standing on the top of the steps vaguely looking towards the pigeons in the courtyard. "I suppose a woman has even more of it than a man, because she has so many more opportunities for running up against it."

"How do you mean exactly?"

"Well, I always think that men have a fixed idea about

women. They generally say they don't understand them, which is just as big a lie as saying that they do,—it's just the same lie, really, because it means that they never believe that there's anything to understand. So a woman has only to play with the outside of her mind to satisfy them completely. All the time really she's working back on herself into her own mind.

"I don't say men are very different with men," he went on, "but they do allow the eccentric and they are curious about him. They do try to get behind a little sometimes. But I suppose there are all sorts of women. I don't know very much about them." He raised his eyes from the ground and looked for a moment directly at her. "You see I'm nearly saying the same thing as the other men. But I never said there weren't any difficulties. It would take some work to get behind Mrs. Fortescue, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I think it would. I don't know anything about her, at all events. I think you're right, in general, though. Let's go and have that tea. It's time."

Mrs. Cradock ran down the steps and Maurice followed. He had tried deviously to tell her that he thought that her mind was like his own, and he suspected that he had done it ridiculously. Nevertheless she had helped him and listened to him, even agreed with him. But he was still nervous lest she should think him wearisome and awkward. Yet for all his misgivings he was glad to be with her, and his gladness coloured everything. If only he could stop and take count, and know what she felt. Two phrases continually danced about in his mind while he walked with her along the narrow street. "He's a nice boy" repeated itself. It sounded like a music-hall song.

"We shan't have much more of this sun," said Mrs. Cradock. "It's getting thin and cold already."

"No," he said automatically. He had noticed nothing of it all the day. "Have more pity on yourself—more pity on yourself" echoed in his brain.



In a cushioned corner that overlooked the street, they sat saying nothing. He looked sideways at her, pretending that he was dreamy, so that he could regard her the more carefully. Through the veil, which was heavy and chequered with black, he could see little more than the light in her eyes. Yet something was perfectly familiar to him, and he thought that it must be the shape of her neck. But he felt vaguely that it was something more tangible, not merely the neck but the framing of the neck. At his discovery he nearly uttered a cry. The grey-mauve ruffle of gauze was the same that she had worn last night. Yet it could not be the same, for he remembered perfectly that she had worn a long dress, not a blouse.

"Day-dreaming, Mr. Temple?" she said. And he flushed. "The spring day makes me very tired, too. I'd only just wakened myself."

"Oh, no, I wasn't dreaming." He was in haste to repel the suggestion, reproachfully. "I was. . . . Perhaps I was dreaming. . . . It all depends. I wouldn't have called it dreaming, though."

Tea was set before them, and Mrs. Cradock raised her veil. Suddenly Maurice felt much more secure.

"What *would* you have called it then?" she said smiling, as she began to pour the tea.

"I don't know. I was interested in something, thinking hard about it; but I wasn't dreaming."

"What was it? Please tell me."

He gulped the words out. "I am wondering whether you wore that dress on purpose. It's the same as last night, you see. It's fixed in my mind." At the same moment, with the same words, he was asserting and defending himself.

"On purpose!" she said. "Why should I? What a strange idea!"

"I suppose it is. But I do have them sometimes—strange ideas . . . I'm very sorry." He paused a moment. "D'you know what it is? I'm frightened to death by the



thought that you'll find me ridiculous. I'm quite . . . helpless! Oh!" He jerked back his head in despair. "Tell me what you think of me, really. I don't know anything about you, and you know all about me. It's not fair."

She leaned forward a little on the table and stretched out her hand towards him until it touched his. He took it, hopelessly, seeing in the gesture only one more incomprehensible. She clasped his hand firmly. "I like you very much, Mr. Temple. I'm only anxious about you. Please don't think I'm laughing at you. I couldn't do it." His misery didn't seem to change. "Oh, what would you have me do? I'm happy to be with you. What do you want? You see it isn't a game for me. I wish I could make you happy. Will it be any good if I say that I came here just to see you, to-day? . . . I did."

The astonishment first of incredulity, then of a sudden conviction, seized him.

"I'm just a fool," he said desponding. "I didn't mean to worry you like that. But I was so miserable. I am all right now, though." Indeed he was smiling. Mrs. Cradock still held his hand. "Why do you like me?" he said.

"How can I tell?"

"I thought you'd know somehow. You see, I don't know why I like you, except because you seem perfectly different from any other woman. There is nothing to take hold of in you and say, 'That's not good enough. You're perfect. But I know I'm not. Anyone can see that, and everybody knows it. So I thought perhaps you'd know.'"

"I don't, really," she protested.

"But you don't think you'll be tired of me soon?"

She laughed.

"But you don't know how happy I am now," he went on. "I feel safe with you, and I never feel safe when I'm alone. I haven't thought of anything else except you

since last night, and that seems years ago. Somehow I knew you would be there to-day, but everything said I was a fool. And I waited and waited, but I always believed you'd come, somehow."

She was glad that she had calmed him ; and in calming him she had calmed herself. She too felt secure. "We must go now," she said.

"Must we ?"

"Of course. I have to get home to dinner. We've been here a long time."

"But we've hardly said anything."

"Why should we ?"

Maurice watched her pay, thinking of what the last words might mean. He felt that he was being accused in them, and rightly accused. She must have misunderstood what he meant by talking about things. He wanted her to speak about herself. He wanted to tell her all about himself too. Those things weren't unimportant ; yet he felt that she was right. There really wasn't anything else to say. The trouble was that she was infinitely bigger than he. He was childish while she was serene.

They walked together through a square, whose solid black buildings stood out against the sunset sky. He had not noticed anything until she pointed out the beauty to him, but he acquiesced. "You're worrying about something still," she said.

"I want to know when I shall see you again. It's useless. I shall have to wait days and days. I don't know what I shall do when you go away. I suppose I shan't believe it for a long while. But I shall have to, and then I don't know what I'll do."

His words struck suddenly cold upon her, cold and heavy, heavy. Suddenly she was one of those women she had seen at the end of a windy day bowed and beaten by the weight of the dark heavy child they carried. She longed to fling away this love, to lift up her arms and her breast and be free.

"We just can't see each other. It's impossible. You can see that, can't you? Oh, you must. . . ." She watched his face, again her words were not her own. They shaped themselves apart from her, on every movement of his eyes and lips. "D'you think I don't want to see you? No, you can't think that. . . . But you don't know what it means. You're a child. . . . I don't mean that. But things seem easy to you, and they're not."

Maurice stood still, looking at her, powerless before the impossibility which he dimly saw. She comprehended so much more than he. His simplicities were her complexities. Her language would not translate into his, and he could say nothing.

"Oh, it's no use worrying or planning," she went on. "We can be happy enough sometimes, can't we—Maurice?" She used his name, desperately, tormenting herself, yet hoping to conjure away the misery which threatened him through her. "Yes, there will be plenty of opportunities, if you come to think about it. After all," she laughed, "we can't monopolise each other?"

"But when?" he said with the obstinacy of a child. "It's all very well to say there will be plenty of opportunities. What's the good of that to me? I can't go on just waiting for opportunities. It would be like this morning all over again, day after day. I can't stand it."

A momentary anger took possession of her again; again she was bowed and bent and beaten.

"But don't you, can't you, see that it's hard for me? . . . Oh, don't let's muddle things to-day. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Will you? Why, that's all I wanted." The ring came back into his voice.

She could not help laughing. "Yes, that's *all* you wanted," she repeated. "But I will. Don't be frightened." All the traffic roared dizzily before their eyes as they halted irresolutely on the kerb. The lights, dingy with the last gleams of the sunlight, were dotted palely far



away. "Don't let's go to the Museum again; that's over now."

"Yes," he said, uncomprehending.

"Where shall we meet, then? It must be the afternoon."

He hesitated. "Will you come to have tea with me? I wish you would. It would be wonderful. 37 Vauxhall Embankment. . . . It's a funny place, and out of the way. But I could meet you somewhere else and take you there, if you would."

"I know where it is," she said, "and how to get there. Yes I'll come, at half-past four. You'll be kind to me? I must go now."

He held out his hand. She had already half turned away when she took it, and when he pressed it and tried to see her face it was wholly turned away. He followed her desperately with his eyes to see whether she would turn round. She did not.



## CHAPTER V

It was nearly dark when Anne Cradock reached home. She was very cold and tired. She could not help, as she rode upon an omnibus homewards, contrasting the exhilaration with which she had set out and the numbness that now invaded her. The brief light had shown only the depth of the darkness in which she was enveloped. She blindly comforted herself with the thought that something would happen, because something was bound to happen. She blamed herself for having sacrificed too much that day, for having resigned her defences, her very self. Yet she had left Maurice happy, and that was right, whatever it should have cost to make him happy ; or rather it was wrong to leave him unhappy. But why should a boy's happiness tyrannise over her ? He was only a boy, whose misery would be easily forgotten with another comforter. She would not think of that again.

The green and white house looked obvious and paltry when she stood before the gate. It was an enemy, too, ready to swallow her up. The jaws yawned before her as the door opened. A strong voice sounded from above, echoing down the stairs. She was tired, and she hated strong voices. Their strength was an insult, pointed to remind her that she had forgotten the key by which existence in that house was modulated. She flung herself down upon a seat in the hall ; then, suddenly aware that the maid was regarding her curiously, "I'm very tired. The day has been too much for me."

"The master's calling you, m'm."

Cradock was clattering violently down the stairs. She

seemed to wake out of a dream of voices and attach the strong and insistent one to him. She rose and saw him, ludicrously big at the top of the narrow stairs.

"Hullo, Anne, you're late. Didn't you hear me?"

"No, I don't think I did. I'm awfully tired. It must be the beginning of spring."

"Yes, that's it. You've done too much to-day. Why, you've been out since the morning?"

"Yes, it must have been a long while."

"Cheer up. You want your dinner. I know I do. Only ten minutes."

"I don't think I do, Jim. I'm frightfully tired, and I've a headache. I'll go upstairs and rest." She knew that she was no longer sure of herself, not even sure enough to win through a dinner opposite to him, to engage and answer him for half an hour.

"Oh." He looked disappointed. "I didn't know it was as bad as that. I'm very sorry, Anne. And I have to go to the play to-night. Would you rather that I didn't? I dare say I could manage to get Jamieson to go, I'm sure I could."

"I'm a fraud, Jim. That's what's the matter. And you're a great dear. But I shall probably be all right in half an hour. Please don't worry young Jamieson again. It's not at all serious. Besides, even if it were, I should only get worse by thinking that Jamieson was doing it instead of you, and making a mess of everything. I hate anybody else doing your work. It's bad enough when you're ill yourself."

"I do like doing it, that's true."

She began to mount the stairs. "Well, then . . . Good-bye. . . . But you'll come and look at me before you go. Don't go telephoning to old Cumming behind my back. I'd never forgive you, if he came round and felt my pulse. 'My dear lady, you've been overdoing it.' Though he knows it's a perfect sham. It really is, you know. But I think I enjoy shams."

"All right, I won't, honour bright. I'll give you the guinea though—a reward for economy."

"Admirable." Fatigue was in her voice, in the word itself. "Don't forget there's a new bottle of Vermouth."

She saw him take out a cigarette-case as she turned the corner. Her room was lighted by the flames of a newly kindled fire. She turned the key in the lock.

She lay comfortably in an armchair and contemplated herself in the mirror. "You're pale," she said. "You look tired, very tired."

Anne Cradock was thirty-two years old, and to-night the darker shadows under her eyes and a curious pallor in her face lent to her a certain agelessness. She was pleased to find herself mysterious to-night, as though suddenly she had beheld an aspect of herself hidden from her ordinary eyes, and could enjoy the sight of it without any afterthought of vanity. . . .

The position was ridiculous. She was allowing herself to fall in love with a boy who talked about "harmonies of the soul." That was foolishness number one. She duly ticked it off upon her fingers, glad to introduce something solid into the confusion of her thoughts and feelings. Secondly, she had wanted to fall in love with him. It was proved. She had meant all the while to go and look for him in the Museum that day. Thirdly, he was very young, a boy, and though he probably imagined that he was in love with her, he did not know anything about it. Fourthly, she had pledged herself to go and see him in his rooms to-morrow, which was reprehensible and childish. Fifthly, she had allowed him to fall in love with her, or to imagine that he had fallen in love with her, all in one day, though she might perfectly well have done nothing of the sort. . . .

She made a petulant gesture of restraint, displeased because she realised that her arguments were superficial and wholly unrelated to the truth which she felt, disgusted at her own helplessness before the mechanical triviality of



her thought, which would not engage with the reality. She could exert no compulsion upon it. All that she could do was to stop the ineffectual revolutions of her mind, and to allow herself to collapse, thinking of nothing at all.

As she lay back in the chair, outstretched towards the fire, vague sensations of fatigue, of isolation and of warmth clouded about her, but after a moment there began an insistent undertone, though not sensation and hardly thought, yet strangely real. At first it seemed to be a consciousness of wrong-doing. At the suggestion her mind was once more alert. She refused to admit, as she had always refused to admit, any obligation upon her emotions. Faithlessness towards her husband was an impossibility. The word no longer fitted the act in her case. There was too much honesty in their genuine affection and too much indifference in their mutual aloofness to admit of any tragic interpretation of a fact which they both understood. She would do what she liked securely, confident, because she had never pretended to do anything else. But now she was neither secure nor confident. Something in the quality of the day's happenings was wrong, and the wrong had been done to herself, even though for a moment she persisted in regarding it as wrong done to the boy. "I have cheapened myself in his eyes." It was untrue. The faith which Maurice had so obviously given to her had in it no element of calculation or criticism. Besides, she had done nothing which he might criticise. She was ashamed of nothing in the day. It was a regret, a mistake which now occupied her. She had succumbed to an overwhelming pity for a nature which she understood, she thought, completely, and pity would not last them long. Inevitably each would demand something more, she the more quickly by far, something which could not be given. Why, she was seeking for it now, and blaming herself because she had ventured so much without it.

She stretched her hands behind her neck and clasped them. The attitude expressed her relief that she had come



to some understanding of what had happened to her that day. She laughed at herself a little, as her habit was, because her conclusions always seemed transparently plain. "No one would believe that I have to work hard to get there," she said to herself. Everything was straightforward. It would not really be very difficult to explain to the boy. She could talk her own language to him, confident that he would understand the rightness of her decision. Perhaps he would not have to sacrifice anything. There was no reason why the security which he felt with her should not endure. . . . "Oh, I won't go on with this," she said.

She had forgotten to take off her clothes. Jim would be up in a moment. Hurriedly she took them off and put on a dressing-gown. She found *David Copperfield* by the side of her bed, and sat down in the armchair poising the book on her knees, turning over the leaves to find the old, jam-stained pictures of her nursery days. She looked at Peggotty's house by the sea, and it floated off as she looked at it, drumming with her fingers upon the arms of the chair.

After a few minutes Cradock came in to ask how she felt and to say good-bye before he went away to the theatre. He scolded her in some boyish, half-serious words because she had not eaten the food he had sent up to her, but her reply that she couldn't, although she had tried, completely satisfied him. The atmosphere of his big physical perfections enveloped all her wilfulness and contrariety in a subtle security. He was habitually so much at peace within himself that he could regard all his experiences with a calm and uncomprehending tolerance, and of these experiences she was in the end only one, more prolonged and in itself more various than others, but yet to be received with an infinite good humour, to be accepted rather than criticised, and indulged rather than understood. As this attitude had in him been always instinctive, so had she come to take it for granted and to be glad that so much warmth could endure with so little friction, for she knew

and felt that he was to the limit of his power in love with her, and though this was no more than a considerable affection it surrounded her with a benignant and paternal adoration, guarded by which she could be careless and free. There was no need to deceive him in anything, because on the few occasions when she had attempted to tell the truth about herself, he had been distracted, comprehending nothing, sure that he was deeply understanding when he had stroked her hair and had dismissed the attempted exposure as fanciful. All her oppositions had fallen within herself since she had been married to him. He never attempted to assert himself against her or dominate over the temperament which he recognised in her as a peculiar, curious and fragile thing, exactly as he might have regarded a nest of carved ivory boxes made by the subtle Chinese, estimating it as precious because it was intricate and not lightly to be disturbed.

She had no impulse therefore actively to maintain herself against any encroachments from him, but eventually she had apprehended a dim danger of being weakened by this very lack of opposition. Almost instinctively she set great value on her inward conflicts, as affording her some proof of an active life which she might otherwise have doubted, and she had soon reached a strange degree of explicitness in her debates with herself. Indeed, she felt some pride in the completeness with which she could follow out a dialogue between her two selves for hours on end, and in the thoroughness of the deception by which her voice, when she talked to herself, seemed to have a really stranger sound. Yet all the time she was conscious that these evolutions were conducted within the safety of the haze of Jim's comprehensive affection, and sometimes she was near to regretting that the affection lacked some quality which would have rendered the whole process silly and inconceivable.

At the moment when Jim bent over her chair, looking at her book, which he despised as sentimental, she could not help wondering how it was possible that she could

enjoy the safe protection which his devotion afforded her, while her mind was still occupied with the decision which she had triumphantly made. If she could only have found some point of solid antagonism in her husband the situation would not have been so ridiculous. It would be easy to make one, she thought for a moment, watching his big hands folded over hers, by telling him that the whole business was rubbish, and that in a day she had fallen in love with young Temple and out again. In a second she knew that it would do nothing of the sort, no matter how much she might insist, for the simple reason that he would never believe it, nor even, not believing, have any suspicion that it might conceivably be true.

"Jim, aren't you appallingly stupid about me?" she said to him.

"Appallingly," he agreed.

"Why can't you really be serious about me? Why don't you just for once have an idea that I'm unfaithful, or, if that's too definite, imagine that I'm compromising myself with somebody. You don't know how exciting it would make life for you for a day or two." Her heart was beating hard now, for this was exciting and adventurous. On an impulse she kicked her slipper on to the fire. It was covered with lace, which caught instantly into flame, leaving little red lines glowing where the pattern had been. "There," she said, "you can't understand that, can you now?"

"No, I'm damned if I can. They were jolly slippers."

In the silence the glass beads from the burnt slipper tinkled into the fender.

"Say you'll take the guinea away from me that you promised. Do!"

"But I shan't; you know as well as I do."

"Give it me now, then, now."

"I don't believe I've got it." He removed his hands from hers and stood upright behind her chair, feeling in his pockets. He found a sovereign and a shilling and gave



them to her. She rose from the chair with the money clasped tight in one hand, facing him. He was looking at her steadily, his lips parted a little in his habitual smile, in which showed something of the tolerant sympathy he felt. He was smiling because he did not understand, to conceal his ignorance and uncertainty. Quickly yet awkwardly, with a sudden gesture of her hand as a child throwing a ball, she flung the money at the electric light which hung before the mirror in the corner of the room. The bulb shattered.

"Why, what's up, Anne?" Before he had time to reach her, she was in her chair, crying quietly, and weakly laughing.

"You're nervous-tired, darling." Jim bent over her and stroked her hands.

"I'm sorry—look for my money, dear, there's a dear, Jim, please."

He left her with a show of reluctance, and, striking a match, hunted among the gleams of the broken glass on the floor. He was not quite comfortable. He was always frightened, against his certain judgment, when she did such things, as she had done once or twice before, and he was uneasy in his effort to treat them as occurrences perfectly natural. Once, the first time, she had hurled a glass from the dinner table against the wall, and he, to show that he too had the same impulse, had thrown his. Then he had felt ridiculous, and known that she found him ridiculous too. He was glad to be hunting for the coins on the floor. Finding them he waited a moment, pretending to be still engrossed in the search, and then, with an assumed cheerfulness, he called out :

"I've got 'em."

"That's all right," she said, "that's all over. I don't know why I do those things. Here, you must only give me the sovereign now. No, don't turn up the other light."

"I wasn't going to," he said, handing her the sovereign.



"Now don't be reproachful. I caught it in your voice that time. I thought perhaps you might be going to, that's all. But do you think I didn't notice that you struck a match instead at first. . . . You're good, much better than me. Still, I'm all right now, quite better and perfectly sensible. You'll be late too. I am very sorry. But don't be worried waiting." She stood up again and caught his hand and kissed it. "All serene. Turn up the light, anything you like." He had caught hold of her, clasping her head to his shoulder. "You understand it's all over now, don't you?"

He kissed her and was silent for a little.

"Won't you want the light? I'll get another, it won't take a minute. I shan't be late."

"I don't want it, truly. I'd rather not have it. I like the fire-light, it's good to think by. Poor old Peggotty." She released herself from his arms and picked up the book from under the chair. "I don't believe it will hang together much longer. Twenty-seven years. It's a shame to bring it into such a savage household. I wonder I didn't throw that on the fire, too. Now, Jim, you must go. You'll only make me angry with myself, and then I shall do something absolutely terrible. Don't provoke it. What time will you be back? If you're really going to be back between one and two, I'll be waiting for you, probably. I don't know, though. I think I'm thoroughly tired. We'll see."

"You're really better, honest Injun?"

"Yes, really, Jim. You must go now. Have you got enough money for a cab?"

"Yes. But I feel I ought not to leave you like this."

"Like what? I've told you I'm quite right. Don't you believe me?"

"Well, if you say so. But you are inclined to say you're fit when you're not, aren't you?"

"Never. I'd never dream of making out I was better than I was in fact. Quite the other way. You'll be so late,

though." She stepped towards him and gave him a kiss, pushing him gently towards the door. "Now don't be contrary. It's so exhausting."

"I won't. Good-bye : but do look after yourself. Is there anything I can bring in for you ? "

"No, thanks. Good-bye. Work hard. You've got to keep me, after all." She heard him go more slowly than his wont down the stairs, and then dulled voices reached her, conversing for a moment near the door. It was strange, she thought, that he should be really concerned about her. The door closed, without slamming. At the sound a great weariness came over her. The springs that had been taut and vibrant within her, suddenly slackened altogether, and to prevent herself from falling she reached out towards the bed-rail. Her face, she knew, was smiling, beyond her control. She guided herself round by the edge, and slowly climbed upon it, composing herself for sleep. . . .

A roaring, not terrible, as of falling water in the sunlight, slowly died down about her ears, sinking at last into the low, clear tone of a distant pipe. Far away through the dense blackness was a little movement, unseen yet certain, and from its eddying emerged a point of silver light. For a moment it pulsed with shadows, modulating its brilliance to the voice of the pipe. As the note of the pipe rose higher and more clear, the light shone clearer, and as it descended, shadows broke from the centre of the light and spread in waves outward to its edge, which was the living darkness. The voice and the light were one. Together as though governed by some long determined purpose, they became more brilliant, yet the ebb and flow of the light and the rising and falling of the pipe never ceased ; and as the music sounded more triumphant and the circling waves of light broke further into the darkness, fixed beams of radiance advanced outward from the central point, along which came yet more light and more sound. By slow and unchecked progression all the darkness was invaded by these veins of light and sound, but the darkness was not

driven away by them, but rather in their full clearness it could be seen that the dark was not dark, but only the shade within the very flame of brilliant light. Now the sound of the pipe filled all the space about, having reached the pinnacle of music ; yet it was always one voice, clear and unfaltering, swelling with life. The light was spread throughout the sphere, for its last circle was always the furthest bound and circumference of all things. Then the whole harmony seemed to be poised in its perfect completion, and the swiftly moving circles of light could be seen swiftly returning from their farthest range along the fixed rays, diminishing incessantly yet with undiminished brilliance until they reached the central point, from which while they entered they emerged again and sped outward along the rays. Each circle of light was a wave of sound. The motion of the whole was comprehensible, as though the light and sound, once seen and heard, were known by their own nature to move thus and only thus. Something watched and understood the motion, and was part of it, glad and sorrowful at once, for this motion and this knowledge of the motion were beyond all gladness and sorrow. First the infinite progression of the circling waves from the living point was terrible and swift in its vehemence, and the soul was awed ; as they returned, the soul was moved with pity and joy, for always the last wave broke over the soul and bore it away in the harmony of light and sound of which it was a part. It was glad, for it was a part of the great brightness and the unending music ; it was full of pity for the dear and familiar things from which it was borne away. Yet from these it was not wholly severed. It was with them even while it moved along the ray with the light, and the knowledge of this was terrible. The parting could not be endured for ever, and as the pain of parting became intense, the unending sweep of the circles and the triumphant note of the pipe was a menace, from which the soul could not escape. The waves broke over it incessantly, yet it did not die, but lived in the sure know-



ledge that the next wave would bring death. Then the soul saw that the movement of the great harmony was motionless, and heard that the voice of the pipe had no sound. Every light and every note was poised and still. To its vision the circles moved and to its hearing the sound rose and fell, but the soul knew that all was fixed eternally. It sought to cry out against the horror, but its voice was the sound of the pipe.

Slowly an atom of life in the soul stirred, and a flickering point of consciousness woke, and the soul knew it was weeping. From the centre of pain spread veins of suffering, and these were the soul. The last circle of light no longer broke over it, but the motion was always keen and understood. There came a great weariness of weeping, and in the weariness was a smile; and the soul knew that this was the smile of human death. Knowing this the soul was conscious of body, and strove against the weariness of weeping and the smile which would take hold of the lips of the body and the body be dead. While it fought against this death the light and the motion and the sound were smaller and smaller, yet visible and perfect, containing in themselves the point of living light which might grow again, and the old terror reawaken. The soul was weeping again and the weariness and the smile which was in it were forgotten in the agony of impotence. Only the central point remained in the darkness, and the pipe was a remembered voice. The consciousness of body, once born, remained. The soul and the body were weeping together in darkness for the blind terror of eternity.

She dared not raise her head. It was bowed, and it must remain bowed under the pressure of the darkness above her. She knew that she was weeping, yet, though she listened for the sound, she heard none, and her eyes were not wet. Her desire for a sound was overwhelming. She caught at the pulse of her own heart and it did not beat at all. She knew that she was not dead, because death had threatened her and she had withstood it. Her soul had



joined her body and she was alive. She waited in suspense for the sound of movement, endeavouring with all her will to force some part of her body into action. Her body was motionless with fear. She knew that nothing had changed in the room, and that everything was familiar and set in its familiar place, but she was afraid to rise and see it with her eyes.

Slowly and deliberately she raised herself from the bed and looked about her. There was no flame in the fire which now glowed red. Other than this, nothing was changed. And yet everything had changed. It had become infinitely old and changeless, as though suddenly a breath had passed through the room and her own soul and made the world timeless and old and evil. The feeling that rose up in her had risen from too deep down in her to be made definite in words, for words belonged to another world than that in which this hidden principle reigned. Where she had been she knew that life and motion and change were illusion, by which men's eyes are blinded. The revelation was not wholly new to her. This final completeness linked in her mind with the vague dreams of her childhood, when she had awakened cold with fear, and to her mother who asked her what it was that frightened her, had replied that it was lines and things going backwards and forwards on them. And later, when she first entered the new railway underground, and waited on the platform, the vision of the round bright train swinging towards her out of the darkness had struck her mind with the same terror. These things could be related to her dream. They were fulfilled and completed in the vision from which she had just emerged.

But there were others which she knew belonged to the same order, for they woke the same dread in her, which she could not understand. Her first and only sight of obscene carrion birds, perched hoary and foul and immobile, with ruffled and decaying feathers, while beneath them, an indefinite distance away, lay red and uncouth

bones, had filled her not with disgust, as she tried to reassure herself, but with terror. "They were perched out of all time," she said, explaining herself to Richmond, a garrulous and silent friend of Dennis's. "They were eternally old"; and Richmond knew what she meant. "I call it the metaphysical horror," he said. "I had to call it something. But then I get it more often than you. I could tell you—no I won't." He had relapsed into silence, and she had never dared to ask what he was going to say. Twice since then she had been troubled, and strangely, because on both occasions she had been brought suddenly into contact with things Egyptian. The first time was when she had seen a statue of the Baboon God in the Louvre, and between his knees a scribe writing his words. The scribe, carved as though he were still drawing deep silent breaths and his pen were moving incessantly over the page of his book, was not frightened by the terrible god. The second time, she had glanced through a book which Richmond had left behind him at their house, containing translations from Egyptian hieroglyphs, and her eyes had fastened on a phrase: "The Boat of Millions of Years."

But to-night and now she understood what this thing might be. A greyness, not of colour, seemed to be shed over all things before her eyes. If only there were someone near her to comfort her by understanding what she had suffered only a moment ago in that very room, what she was suffering now.

Her mind reached instantly out to Maurice. She moved slowly to her writing table and took hold of a pen. She was crying bitterly and smiling at once; and she laid down the pen, recognising and acquiescing in the depth of her sudden delusion.

## CHAPTER VI

ANNE CRADOCK awoke into an established and victorious sunlight, which glowed from mirror to mirror in her bedroom. Rubbing her eyes, she knew that it was already late, and for a moment she was annoyed by the thought that she had slept into the afternoon. She soon convinced herself that this could not be, and then she was reluctant to arise or stir. No impulse to think about things vexed her where she lay. Her thoughts seemed rather to detach themselves like a vapour from her mind and float lazily upwards in her sight until they finally dissolved into the dust of the sunbeams. She could not hold them for a moment.

She raised her head and looked over the panels at the foot of the bed. One of her beaded slippers twinkled in the rays that fell upon the hearth. When she recognised it she turned to peer over the edge of the bed. A powder of gossamer glass shone like hoar-frost on the floor. The sight did not please her and she sank eagerly back into the remote contentment of her pillow. She rang the bell which dangled to her fingers. The maid appeared.

"Please clear up my floor while I'm in bed. I shan't get up till it's done. I'll go to sleep again, and you must wake me when you've finished."

"Yes, m'm."

"Is the master at home? . . . Why didn't anybody wake me up? . . . What's the time now?"

"Just after twelve, m'm. The master went out early. He told me that you weren't to be waked. He said he might be in to tea."

"Very well. I'll get up as soon as you've



finished. There's some glass here." She closed her eyes again.

She had dressed and begun to eat a belated breakfast before her mind would work consecutively. During the short minutes which she gave to that meal her sleepy contentment expanded into an acute sense of well-being. The dull memory of a night of terror vanished quickly before the influence of her decision to see Maurice. It was very fortunate that they had arranged to meet that afternoon. Such things were best done quickly. The prospect of a day of certain sanity even excited her.

She took up a book of dramatic criticism from the table and settled herself to read. Although she fixed her eyes intently upon it, she comprehended nothing, and arrested herself at the bottom of the page with vehemence, as though she were guilty of a slightly disreputable deception.

"I'm going out," she said, and returned to her room. She dressed exactly as she had done the day before.

The maid knocked at the door. Mr. Beauchamp had called in to get a book which he had left behind, but he did not want to disturb Mrs. Cradock. He was downstairs in the drawing-room.

"Tell him to wait a moment, Richardson. I'll be down in a few seconds."

Anne welcomed the prospect of a few minutes' speech with Dennis, if the conversation should serve only to steady her. Already she had begun to feel the strain of her impatience. Dennis was just the person to distract her from the anxiety with which her mind and her body conspired to vex her. She ran down the stairs.

"How are you, Dennis?"

"Splendid, thanks, Mrs. Cradock. I've only come for a book that Cradock lent me. I forgot to take it away with me. . . . I meant to come yesterday, but I couldn't get away from the hospital in time."

"Was it a book in a green cover—dramatic criticism?"

"Yes, that's it. I forget who it's by."

"I've got it. I tried to read it this morning, but after I had finished the first page, I hadn't the least idea what I'd been reading about. I'll get it before you go. Sit down a moment. You're not going immediately?"

"I'll smoke if I may. It's my lunch interval, you know."

She felt nervous and cold; her hands were trembling and she thought that Dennis would observe a strangeness in her. She made haste to speak.

"That was a curious dinner-party. The air was so thundery, from the very beginning. After that it was all clouds and flashes. I enjoyed it very much, but I'm certain Mrs. Fortescue has made a vow never to accept an invitation of mine again. . . . I had no idea a dinner-party could be such a dramatic affair."

"Nor I, really. But I had a feeling that something would happen as soon as I got into the room. I've a *flair* for these things. I'm so desperately self-conscious for other people . . . it's the result of my awful education, I suppose." There was a silence.

"I know what you mean," said Mrs. Cradock at length. "I get terribly ashamed for people who seem to be making themselves ridiculous. . . . It sounds like a good thing, but I feel it's bad. I wonder why?" She paused to ponder. "Probably it's because you can't be ashamed for other people without despising them. . . . That's quite different to being sensitive for them. It's the disease of the social standard. You can't accept people for themselves, can't listen unless they speak with the accent. . . . No, we can't listen at all."

"That's true. When you come to think of it, it's a pretty rotten state to be in—never more than half-way to being a listener. . . . Perhaps there aren't any more real listeners left in the world. . . . Or are they the kind of people Morry was talking about that night? . . . (Morry is short for Maurice Temple. I've always called him that.)"

There was a silence.

"Have you ever read Plato?" he asked. "What I remember about him is not the speakers or what they say, but the calm of listening. Most of the words are beyond me—but the listeners are wonderful. Very often they didn't say more than 'yes' or 'no' for hours, but you can't forget them. . . . You can hardly imagine a state of mind like that nowadays. . . ."

"Perhaps that's what we're after," said Mrs. Cradock. "To be able to listen. . . . I could understand that, anyhow."

"Better than I should, I'm sure. I rather think you've got something of it yourself, although it's against my principles to grant a woman anything of the kind. . . . But if it were to happen that I got into that state—well, I don't think I'd be quite at home in it somehow."

They sat silent for some time, while the dull roar of the traffic broke faintly into the room, rising slowly and as slowly falling, until its last whisper remained constant in their ears.

Anne's voice was calm and firm. Dennis was grateful for its fitness.

"I think that this is a very real belief for some people. Your Mr. Temple, for instance, believes in it, doesn't he? . . . I don't think that Jim does,—do you?"

Immediately Dennis felt that he was passing sentence. He felt not that she was depending upon his answer, but that never before had he judged a man by a standard so sure. Therefore he hesitated. Almost he seemed to wait for a voice not his own to move his lips. Then, recollecting himself, he shirked the issue.

"I couldn't say. . . ."

Against his own will he was compelled to deny his own words.

"No. . . . I don't believe he would have any idea of what it means."

Now he had given more than he had been asked; yet



he knew that he could not have avoided it. Had he made another answer, she would have despised him for the lie. A great responsibility had been put upon him; and he was glad now that he had been made to bear it.

Strangely he knew that the question she had asked had been the end of a struggle. It was the outward sign of a great change in her. He admired and wondered at her calm.

But the impulse to refuse the burden was still strong. If he could not deny his words, he could whittle them away.

"I don't think many people would have any idea of what it means, you know," he said. "I know a good many—good men—who might have listened to this conversation and not have understood a word."

"I am sure that's true. Besides, we haven't spoken clearly even to ourselves. But I believe that the listeners"—she smiled a little at the word—"would have understood. Those that wouldn't—well, there's something wrong with them."

"But it is so very particular," he urged, "it's like a secret code."

"Do you really think so?"

"No, not really."

"You're a Cappadocian. It is a Cappadocian?—one of those who blow hot and cold in the same breath. You're caught red-handed this time. . . . But you're inclined to the good side, to-day, more than usual. Why is that, I wonder?"

"It's your own fault. You've got a way of forcing me up to things. That's why I generally avoid talking to you. You're too exacting altogether."

"I'm sorry."

"No, that's my fault. I hate playing above my hand. It lets me down with a crash afterwards. . . . Can I say what I like?"

"Anything you like. It's the afternoon for anything. . . . It doesn't happen often."

"Well, do you know? . . . No, I don't think I will. . . . On the point of a confession. Just stopped in time."

She did not ask him what he meant, but she was both glad and disappointed that he had not spoken.

"I hope I'm not responsible for all this," she said. "You mustn't let me worry you. I don't mean to."

"You don't."

"I'm glad of that. I like talking to you very much. You understand so much more than you ever will allow to yourself. . . . But I should hate to think that I tormented you."

"No. Give me credit for something. I do that part of it at least myself."

Mrs. Cradock thought, and said :

"I think it comes to this—that you use me to put questions to yourself. I'm not complaining. I only want you to admit that I'm not an accomplice, not deliberately, anyhow."

"I admit it. In any case I exaggerate. Then it is different, . . . talking to you I am always playing below my hand, . . . for safety. You pull me up, very nearly make me plunge. It's rather a shock, that's all."

"The way I pull you up, do you mean?"

"No. It's just being pulled up. There's only one way to do it, I believe. . . . Only it makes me angry with myself afterwards. I shall be furious when I get outside. . . . God pity my patients this afternoon!"

Anne laughed outright.

"It's not really funny," he said.

"Oh, but it is. You're just going to have an orgy of self-pity, and you expect me to help. I'll not do it. Besides, it's unreasonable to expect it. It always ends in the same way. Up till now I've managed to hold out. But do you set a trap on purpose, or is it just natural with you?"

"Something of both, probably," he said, laughing. "But I must go now. I don't want to a bit. . . . All the same

it's good to be put through my paces. You mustn't take me too seriously. . . . You wouldn't, anyhow. That's where you always have the advantage. You deprive me of my rights. I don't have the chance of demolishing myself for you. You've always done that yourself. . . . That's where you're so disconcerting."

"But other people do that too, surely ? "

"Plenty. It depends how it's done, though."

"How do I do it then, tell me ? "

"I don't know. That's your secret. But if you mean how it appears to me—well, even then it's difficult. Perhaps you don't quite demolish everything. There's something left. I'd like to know what it was. It might be some use to me, really some use."

"You make me too Machiavellian, really."

"No, not quite that. I don't insinuate that you know more about me than I do myself. I know a great deal too much. Besides it would be a burden for you. . . . You know just enough."

"I must be very wonderful."

"No, but I'm occasionally honest: nothing more. All I've been saying only means that you don't fit into my formulas. Most people do." He paused a moment, reflecting. "No, I must say you don't fit. At least, not to-day."

"Now you're being obscure. Have I done anything particular to-day to make you say that ? "

"Yes, I think you must have. I don't know exactly when it happened," he said disingenuously.

"That's a pity. I would like to know what it was. Perhaps you know just enough about me too."

He shook his head, and stood up to take his leave. "If I thought I did," he said, "I should give up my job on the spot and take to—well, let's say writing novels."

Only Dennis's movement from his chair convinced her that he was going. She was now quite calm, able to judge



serenely. Although she had been so occupied that she had not turned her mind to that which most nearly concerned her, she felt that she had been enabled to consider it calmly when she would, and she was grateful to Dennis for having recalled her to herself. She half regretted that he was going, for she thought that she could have long continued this slow interchange of words. That they so feebly corresponded to the feelings which were their occasion excited her as a dangerous game. Dennis had understood something of what had been passing with her, she knew, but she did not resent his knowledge. He had a right to all that he could discover.

"We're very solemn to-day," she said. "Don't you feel that? . . . But honestly I have enjoyed it."

He nodded thoughtfully, and with a half-smile said :

"I've had the same feeling. . . . It's silly to go away now. I must, though. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Don't forget your book."

He paused at the door. "I've forgotten it already." He returned to pick up the book from the chair in which he had left it. She listened to him quietly moving from the quiet house.

She began to think about herself and Maurice, knowing that whatever she should now resolve to do would be right. A glance at the clock told her that within an hour she would be leaving the house, but she felt neither impatience nor agitation. It was strange, she mused instead, how completely Jim had passed away. In her mind ran the old phrase which she remembered by its distinction of capitals in her school Bible, "MENE, MENE," and she was comforted by its palpable finality.

Jim had been rejected once and for all deliberately, by that which lay deeper in herself than her surface debates. While she sat quiet in the room that Dennis had left so calm, she felt glad at the clearness of her own vision. Also she rejoiced at the positive victory won, having completely put away her husband into a past which had

been before only in moments discarded. The same clear light gave to the events of the day before a new and just perspective. Little isolated pictures passed before her eyes—of herself regarding the painter high on the house wall, her solitary seat in the Park, the eager Mr. Mortimer at the restaurant, and finally an almost stereoscopic image of the room in the Museum, and Maurice's nervous crouching figure at tea. Though she knew that the woman was herself, she could hardly recognise her in those particular surroundings. She seemed to have been so small; small before the house, insignificant in the Park, shrinking in the restaurant. Only the entrance of Maurice lent to her a comparative bigness, which was again diminutive against herself of to-day. A sense of expanding strength filled her now, and she knew that the acts of yesterday had been but partially her own. Within an hour that would have all been set right. Her course was perfectly defined, and she was confident in her success. Maurice would understand her, or rather would understand what she would show him of the reality. Nor would he suffer very much.

She could have remained there, sitting still in her chair, listening to the sound of her own breathing for hours, so calm was her mind, yet precisely at four o'clock she prepared to leave the house. She would have time to walk slowly along the Embankment and across the bridge.

When she reached the middle of the bridge she stopped and looked over on to the river. She was thinking of nothing, yet her mind was not vacant, but resting contented in its own poise, as a climber high on a hill will find a deep delight, looking out upon the country spread beneath him, though he regards and remembers nothing with his eyes. A wind so faint as scarcely to be caught upon a seaman's wetted finger played softly about her face. Gradually a dark mass glided from under the bridge into her sight, and she watched the slow lift and strain of the sweep with which the lighterman eased his barge into mid-stream. A little swirling and a few struggling splashes

near the bank drew her gaze to where some small and living thing fought against the water. Before she could tell whether it was bird or animal the struggle had ceased. Close by a boatman lowered himself by a ladder from the wharf into a skiff, and he pulled hard at the stern oar ; yet the boat seemed not to move at all, until she saw him climb on to a laden barge with the painter in his hand and make fast and she knew that there had been some change. Behind the four straight chimneys at the river edge the grey haze of the sky touched the water, and the eye could travel, undisturbed by the black barrier of the opposing bridge, from the water to the air and back again in still security. Into her ears rang the clear echoes of the steps of men crossing the bridge, and they seemed to sound in unison with the quiet colour of the river and the sky ; and then, while she listened, the echoes sank into the lapping of the water on the bridge piers and against the black and empty barges moored to their solitary posts. One vibrant stroke of a bell quivered for a moment in the liquid air, undertone against undertone, and fell after an instant's domination into the indistinguishable silence.

The last tones of the bell were still faintly distinct to her ear when the meaning of the one stroke came to her. She began to hasten over the bridge, instinctively moving down from the pavement to the carriage-way to dull the tinkling of her hurried footsteps. Her mind, even her body, was wrapped about by the memory of the stillness, of which her movements bore the impress, although she was hastening. Even the sharp rattle of the door-bell was subdued into it.

"Mr. Temple's expecting you, m'm. Will you go upstairs ? It's the top floor. Or shall I show you the way ? . . . He's just run out this minute to fetch some things."

Anne smiled gently at the woman, and moved towards the stairs. Then she remembered to say that she could find the top floor easily by herself.

Though the door was half-open, she tapped gently upon



it before she entered and sat down in the large chair. The window was open wide. Through it came the louder counterpart of the sound that echoed without pause through her, and she closed her eyes, in a dreamy amusement distinguishing the throb of a motor-omnibus in the street below, and the low hum of the tramcars stealing along the far embankment. All the sounds were one, and one with that which had slowly invaded her while she rested on the bridge watching the river. Now that her eyes were closed, for moments there seemed to be no bound at all between the intimacy of herself and the sound that encompassed her. Only the physical sense of strain and the puckering of her lips in a smile recalled her to the knowledge that she was Anne Cradock listening to a multitude of voices from a world beyond. The word "beyond" shaped itself actually on her lips, and she opened her eyes, surprised that she had not said "outside" and half-reproaching herself for her romanticism.

The general neatness of the room dominated each single object. Evidently Maurice had been ordering everything against her coming. Nothing was out of place. She looked round the room, turning slowly on her heel. "Nothing at all," she said. She paused. "Except," she said. There was a book upon his table, marked in many places by slips of paper, a large black book with the dignified and pretentious binding of a school-prize. She well remembered the kind from her own school days, even if the well-garnished rows of Cradock's bookshelves had not served as a continual reminder. Wondering whether its position was due to an innocent deception, she bent over the table and laid a hand upon the cover to see what the book was. A square of white distracted her eye. Instinctively her regard fastened upon it—a square of white paper, with writing.

The sudden convulsion of her mind was terrible. She had reached for it and now she held it in her hand, not daring to read it, sick and motionless with apprehension.

But, though in a moment the calm of her mind had been changed to an unbearable tension, her body still moved with the deliberation that had become her habit during the last few hours, and she read it with her physical being, her eyes following the contours of the letters slowly like the fingers of a blind man, with the blind man's inevitable comprehension.

"I've gone" it said—there was no preamble—"only a minute before you were to come. I saw everything in a moment. It would have been too awful when you went away again. I've had a morning of it, and I couldn't face a night. I know I'm a coward—but I couldn't. Maurice Temple."

She stood perfectly still with the letter in her hand, bereft of all purpose. Two atoms had come together for a second of time, then parted, lost in the countless millions of their kind. To her then appeared no shadow of hope that she should find him, nor the faintest tracing of a line by which she might direct her action. In the cold clarity of this desolation, her thought ticked and swung like a pendulum, deliberately, incessantly, until she was dizzy with the emptiness in which it moved.

She closed the door carefully and descended the stairs. Apprehensive that the woman would hear her fumbling with the latch and interrupt her, she tried the handles noiselessly and emerged into the street, looking once to the right hand before she turned to the left and hurried on her way. At the bridge corner she stopped irresolutely upon the little island of pavement set in the road, restrained by the sudden knowledge that she dared not cross the bridge. To cross it would be to put an impassable gulf between her and Maurice for ever, she felt, and she would not stir a footstep over the river. Yet there was nothing else to do. She glanced back at the house where he lived, and seeing the flash of the brass knocker, determined that she could not move out of sight of that landmark. From the blank mists which wrapped her mind about and spun

before her eyes, there had emerged nothing to hold her there, yet she stayed, knowing well that Maurice had gone, because she could not have borne to leave his neighbourhood. A policeman was watching her from the pavement opposite. He began to move towards her. She was in agony lest he should ask her if she had lost anything. Instead he begged her pardon and wondered if she was waiting for an omnibus, because they only passed over the next bridge. He pointed to where a small, bright car crawled over the bridge in the distance like a lady-bird.

"No, thank you," she said. She felt she could ask him a question. "I'm waiting for somebody. Have you seen a young gentleman pass along here about ten minutes ago? I have missed him."

"What kind of a young gentleman?" he asked.

At this she was eager, persuaded that he had something to tell her. "A young gentleman," she said again, "with black hair. He came out of that house, over there," she pointed back to the knocker, and he turned to look at it, then swung back to face her, while she was still turned to the house.

"I believe I did," he said after a long time. "He was running, I think. Wait a minute." For a moment Anne thought the policeman must be a ridiculous toy, but though he was remote she watched him intently.

"Mightn't this be the young man?" he said at last, pointing along the street behind her. She spun round almost into Maurice's face. He looked like a runner who had finished his race and had been beaten.

"I've been waiting for you," she said. "It's all right." She turned to the policeman. "Thank you, officer." Then she led the way along the street away from Maurice's house.

He kept pace with her, content only to be led. He was trying to smile, but his pale face and the strain of his lips belied him. At times he broke into a queer hard laugh,



for all the world like a cough, but he did not speak. He coughed or laughed again. "Don't," she said. "You mustn't. Try to stop," and then she stopped and leaned over the stone balustrade of the embankment, he at her side. She looked at him and his head instinctively gave back as though to avoid a blow. She stared at her own hands, and said, "We're both safe here. Please don't." Though she understood the beaten look on his face, it frightened her, and she was anxious that he should speak.

"I couldn't help it," he said. "I had to come back." The moment he had said a word he was eager to be understood. "I meant to go. I felt I couldn't stand it. I thought you would understand; but I had to come back. You're not angry?"

"Of course not," she said.

"I've done something terrible. I know I have. But if you knew what it was like, if you knew what it was like when I had to come back, and I never knew where you were, or what might have happened. Oh, God!"

"I know," she said.

"I couldn't see anything. I don't know what I was going to do. Just run and run. It's all funny, just like a dream."

"Yes."

"But I'm happy now,—I think I am. But I don't know about you. I've done something terrible to you."

"No—nothing."

"Please let us go back. I'm all right now. We shan't get any better here."

"Yes, it would be better," she said. And they went together back to the house. He fumbled mechanically in his pockets for the key and then rang. He led the way past the landlady in silence. Anne said, "Thank you," and followed him. She sat down in the chair which she had left but a few minutes ago, while he walked nervously to and fro, from the window to the door.

"No, I don't see how you could forgive this," he said

at length. "I have no right to come back. Only I had to. And I'm happy even now with you here, though you're miles and miles away from me. I don't see how I could get close to you now." He stood still. "Do you?"

"Don't you ask too much? I can't quite forget it in a moment. That's all the trouble, truly." Her eyes were glistening.

"No, I suppose you can't. . . . It's all unreal to me, but it's not to you." He dropped on to the floor in front of her chair. "Oh, Anne—darling——" he said, and then hid his face in her lap and cried. She bent forward quickly and kissed him, stroking his hair. "It's all over now, really," she said, as he lifted his head to meet her kisses and looked her in the face. "Oh, darling," he said, and bent his head and kissed her hands.

She rose from her chair and took off her hat, regarding herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece. "That's better," she said, and moved into his bedroom. Meanwhile he sat on a stool before the fire tapping with the poker on the hearth, wondering whether it was over now, stirred by a memory of physical pain and tears. In a little while she returned, and as she settled once more in the chair she made room for him beside her. "Come here," she said. He leant his head upon her shoulder, and she caressed his face.

"I wonder how much you understand me?" His only answer was to clasp her closer, and lean his head more nearly to her breast. She was silent for a while and when she spoke, she spoke to herself rather than to him.

"I suppose you're a child. You hurt like a child."

"Do I?" he said. "I'm sorry. I didn't know I'd hurt you so much. It just came over me, I don't know how, and I had to run away. . . . But I had to come back, you see. I didn't know that you loved me—like this. How could I have known? . . . And even if you did, it would have been too awful when you went away. It came to me suddenly."

"What made you think I did not love you?"

"You hadn't kissed me, you see." He had hesitated over the words. Even while he reached up to kiss her lips, he threw back his head in angry despair. "Oh, God. . . . You must know that's a lie, and you let me kiss you. . . . If only you'd be angry with me. . . . You're so calm, you frighten me. I don't know what I've done to you."

He tried to rise while he spoke; but she pulled him towards her and caressed his hair again. "What was the reason?" she asked.

"It was what I wrote, what I've just told you. You'd have had to go away."

"*Would* have had?"

He was silent for a while. "Yes, I suppose you'll have to go away, even now. . . . I can't think of it."

"But you did believe it?"

"Yes. . . . I couldn't see anything else. Was I wrong? Could you?"

"No, I suppose not."

Her answer did not satisfy him; it awakened a mistrust of himself. He felt that the truth lay behind it, and would be for him at once delight and pain.

"Please tell me what you really thought," he said. "You're trying to spare me. I don't want to be spared."

Her immediate past of debate and calm decision had fallen away from her. From her changed self she spoke naturally, with a conviction of truth. "You see, it was different for me. I had decided. If I came to you to-day, I was not going back. But how were you to know that, after all?"

"No," he said doubtfully. "I ought to have known, though. Don't you see that I ought? . . . Oh, Anne, I think you're wonderful, wonderful. . . . But don't you think I ought to have known?"

She did not answer for a few seconds, as though she were deliberating in herself what to reply. "No, I don't think so," she said.



"But that's what hurt you, really," he pursued, "isn't it? I mean that I mistrusted you. There's no other word. And I had no idea of what was happening. Isn't that the truth?"

She nodded. "Yes, I think that was it, even more than that you had gone. It's hard to explain. When I thought you had gone because you didn't quite believe in me, it hurt, hurt. . . . It was silly. . . . But we're all right now."

Inwardly he was wondering at her. He felt that he ought to have known and that he could not have known, and vague in his mind was the notion that too much was expected of him. He was sorry, but he did not see how it could have been different. In truth her quiet declaration that she did not intend to leave him contained a happiness so new and great that even yet he could not wholly believe it, at the moment when he was overwhelmed with joy.

"You're not going, Anne? It's so wonderful that I can hardly believe it. You're so much bigger than I am. I don't think I ever dreamed of it. There's nothing more to say, is there—except that I'm sorry and you must forgive me."

"There isn't any forgiving to be done. . . . So long as you're happy. You are, aren't you?"

"Happy! I can't even feel that you've suffered. I know I've treated you badly, and I say I'm sorry: but inside I'm laughing, simply because I cannot help it, out of sheer happiness. . . . I don't understand it. . . . I couldn't even tell anyone about it. . . . Somehow, I feel quite safe—as though things couldn't knock me down or even touch me any more."

She nodded. "I know. I'm just as happy. Perhaps I came to it differently. I can't tell yet and if I tried to tell, I might be very convincing—to anybody else—but I should know that the real thing wasn't in it."

"Yes, it's ridiculous to talk about it. But yet I can't help doing it."

"I like to. Now your running away is only a kind of dream, just as it is to you. . . . I can't get hold of it, or imagine that it was real." She bent her head in smiling despair.

The dusk slowly entered the room. Although its first signs were almost imperceptible, Anne noticed them, and sat forward.

"Maurice, we must talk seriously. What are we going to do? We must go away, now. We can't stay here. Besides, London's impossible. It must be in the country. I want the country. And we must go now—to-night. . . . You see that, don't you?"

"Yes, of course. . . . I must know some places."

"We must decide quickly. We can do that, you and I. But I must go back first, and I don't want to meet Jim. I'd far rather leave him a note." Maurice did not understand why she smiled. "Not that I mind meeting him," she went on, "but I should hate to see him cry or do anything like that. I might hate him if he did. Yes, I should, and I don't want to do that. So we must be quick. He doesn't come home to dinner to-night; but I want to get my visit to the house over and done with,—now that I've had to think about it.

"I know a lot of farmhouses and places in the country; but they're no good. I was always there with Jim. I couldn't stand suspicions. It would be different with your places."

"I know a farmhouse," he said, "just in between Oxford and Gloucestershire, miles away from anywhere, in the hills. I've not been there for years. It's a good place, and the people like me. Would that do?"

"It sounds as if it might. It's only for a little while, because we have nowhere else to go. . . . But, I'd rather not have anybody at all about. I want us to be alone. Don't you feel that?"

The thought was new to him, but he agreed as though it had been his own.

"Yes, I don't want people. It'd spoil everything, if the house wasn't all our own." He pondered a little while, sitting forward on the edge of the chair, his chin resting on his hands. Anne Cradock remembered the attitude, and laid her arm over his shoulder. He turned towards her and asked dubiously, "would a cottage do?"

"Why, how do you mean, 'would a cottage do?'"

"I thought perhaps . . . Oh, I'm a fool!"

"Well, tell me about the cottage."

"It's in Sussex. It belongs to a man I know—Richmond. Of course, you know him too. He's gone abroad. He once said I might have it when he was away. I haven't got the key, but I know the way in by the window. There's a big garden, and it's part of the way up a hill, not far from where the river runs through the Downs. It's a good place. I know all about it. I once stayed there two months."

"Let's go."

"Besides, I know the trains," he added. "The one we used to catch went just after nine. I've only got to wire to old Moon to drive us out there. It's eight miles from the station. We'll have to take some things, though. It'll be too late to buy them there. Shops shut at eight at Pirford,—that's the station. . . . Oh, but old Moon's sure to let us have enough for a day. Besides, there's two bedrooms," he added inconsequently, "the one I made for myself and Alfred's."

"That's splendid. Now let's make plans. I must go back and get my possessions together. It won't take me long with Richardson. There aren't so very many. I'll have everything done in an hour,—say, an hour and a quarter. What's the time now? Twenty minutes to seven. Well, I can be at the station at eight, and we can have dinner. You can do everything in that time, can't you? You haven't got more things than I have, and you don't have to go home. I've got some money, so don't worry about that." She suddenly turned to him and threw



her arms round his neck. "Oh, Maurice, I'm so excited. I'm talking nonsense. . . . Oh, Morry. . . . Now I'm talking sensibly again. I'll meet you at the station at eight. Take a taxi whatever happens, because the waiting would be impossible."

He had caught her mood, or rather the mood had caught fire from a spark struck between them. "Right!" he almost shouted, "I'll be there, before you. Anne," he said, suddenly approaching her, "I do love you." They held each other close, as though even to part for an hour would be intolerable. "But it's something more," he said. "I can't believe other people feel like this. They'd tell about it more."

"I must go now, Morry. You won't be miserable when I'm gone, will you? No, I know you won't. I must make myself respectable." In a moment she had put on her hat, and kissed him again. At the door she turned. "What's the station?" she said. "You never told me."

"I didn't, either. I'm off my head. Victoria. What would have happened?" As answer to his question he heard her running down the stairs and he listened until the noise of a taxi-cab, which he knew for hers, diminished to nothingness, leaving in his ears only the throbbing of his blood.

## CHAPTER VII

MAURICE was peering about the brilliant station ten minutes before the hour. He had barely had time to glance over the patchwork of the bookstall, before he was borne away irresistibly to the entrance pavement, there to fix his restless eyes upon one cab after another, as they paused for a moment in their sweep to shoot a passenger out of the darkness into the light. He approached so near to their halting-place that he could hear, though without comprehension, each successive traveller declare his destination to the porter who opened his door. His eyes soon told him that there was more than a usual insistence upon what was to be done with their baggage. They pointed out individual trunks upon the porter's waggon with vehemence, and one old man with whiskers of an amazing and translucent whiteness seemed to tire not of smacking the bags, arrayed in order before him, some with one, some with two blows of the ivory-handled stick. The attitude, the insistence, the vehemence, even the old man himself, now marching stiffly to the ticket-office, and rapping with impatient and staccato knocks upon the wooden wall in the distance under the arch, were all familiar. Next from a circling cab emerged one indisputably French by birth and speech. A roll of the "r's" in "registered" detached itself completely from the equable flow of voices which accompanied the kaleidoscopic motion. Maurice responded with a start at the words: "the Paris train." Instantly the familiarity of the coming and going, the gestures, and the old man were explained.

While he watched the incessant sweep of the cabs round the semicircle of the station approach, he gently discovered himself repeating, "Défense de se *pencher* dehors. . . . Défense de se *pencher* dehors." It was an incantation, urging him to smite the heads that were thrust out of the cabs as they swung up to the entrance. Deliberately he decided there were rules to be observed, and that the chief of these was that no heads were to be smitten which should emerge after the cab had stopped, firstly because there would be no satisfaction if all the heads were eligible, and all had eventually to emerge. Secondly, the whole art and science would consist in smiting the moving heads in motion with a fine sweep of the arm, like the great cavalryman who had ridden into his childhood on the outside of a biscuit-tin, cleaving on either hand a suspended lemon, while the cloven fragments paused on their downward flight to the floor. A sufficient instinct to be on the right side of the law restrained him from carrying his new art into practice ; but the game played on clearly in his mind, and he marked the arrival of each outstretched head within his range by a vicious emphasis on his repeated phrase : "Défense de se *pencher* dehors."

Then one came, and it was Anne's.

"Whatever did you say then ? " she asked as she stepped on to the pavement. The porter was staring at him.

"Oh, nothing. . . . It's too stupid. I had to knock off every head that popped out of the window."

She appeared to understand immediately and took his arm. "Tell the man where they are to go to," she said, pointing to her boxes. "I've forgotten all the names except old Moon."

"I knew you'd come, Anne. . . . You're not annoyed with me for doing that, are you ? It was only because I was impatient for you to come. I had to do something. . . . Only three minutes past eight, too. . . . Why you weren't late at all."



"Did you think I was?"

"No, but it seemed a long while. I'd knocked an awful lot of heads off anyhow. Wouldn't it be ghastly if one of us had to wait an hour or something like that?"

"Don't talk about such things. The cab was just like a prison. I kept on knocking at the window to make the man go faster, and it never seemed to move. I had to give him a shilling extra for that. He was a very nice old man, though, a grandfather with a white beard. He said he was doing all he could. . . . So he was. . . . Have you got the tickets?"

Maurice looked at her bemused, and did not answer her question.

"I don't believe you've listened to anything I've said."

"Yes, I have. . . . All about the cabman with a white beard." He shook his head. "No, I haven't got the tickets."

"Let's go and get them. Here's my purse, and then we'll have something to eat."

"Come on then."

"Do you know, Anne," he said as they sat down together at a table in a corner of the restaurant, "I'm hopeless when I'm with you. I'd be perfectly happy not to go anywhere. Everything roars and rushes." He waved his hand generally. "It's so pleasant to hear and look at, that I can't begin to do anything. To buy a ticket now—it's a miracle. It's different having dinner. You only have to sit down and it arrives. It's a wonderful feeling though. . . .

"Can you believe you were in your house this afternoon, only four hours ago? . . . It only begins for me when I came running up to you by the bridge. You might put hundreds of days in between this morning and then; it wouldn't make any difference. I shouldn't know anything about it. . . . Do you feel like that too?"

She winced a little, so little that he did not notice it, before she said, "Yes, just the same. . . . Look at that

waiter over there. He might as well be made of cardboard. That's how he looks to me."

The automatic process that Maurice had expected had been set in motion. The waiter, though Swiss and stolid, was possessed of the discretion of experience, which moved him, after some moments' vain expectation of an order, to start the machinery of the dinner.

"I don't think you're eating very much, Morry. You can't live off excitement."

"But you're not eating anything yourself, Anne. I'm sure I'm eating as much as you."

"Oh, it's different with me, I'm older."

"That's nothing. Not more than a childhood, anyway. There's nothing else different about it."

"But there's no excuse for both of us. We're as bad as each other. We won't do anything more for this one. It's cold; but we'll make a bargain for the next. After the plates have been put down, no one is to talk until the food's finished." She stretched her hand across the table, and he took it. "A bargain?"

"Right," he said.

Their expression was as serious as their labour, until Maurice, grimaced and laughed. "It's no good," he said. "I can't manage it. Please, we've done enough, haven't we? I'm sure it doesn't do us any good. Besides, you're looking at me and I'm looking at you all the while. It's as bad as reading the newspaper."

"I can't go on either. We'll cry quits."

They wandered along to search for an empty carriage in their train. "I can't go into one full of people," she said. "One man, even one man's bag, would make me miserable for hours. I want to hold you close and feel that you're really there. Oh, Morry, I'm a hypocrite. I've tried to be calm since I got out of the cab. But the station's like a great theatre, full of limelight and of people. I've been excited all the while."

He pressed her arm very close to his side. To hear her

words was joy intolerable. Even the little break in her voice when she said "Oh, Morry," seemed to come from his own throat, and to have deprived him of any speech by which he might respond to hers. All that he could do was to press her arm yet closer and hold her fingers intertwined with his.

"Anne, it's all right, there are sure to be plenty of empty ones. I know this train. No one ever goes by it except us. I wish it'd come, though."

"Why, isn't this it?"

"No, it's the one after. Ten minutes before it comes; and then a quarter of an hour before it goes."

"They do it on purpose."

Together they stood in the shadow of a pillar and watched the passengers descend, hurrying to the barrier. Anne drew her cloak more closely round her for the night air was cold. Inconsequently she asked Maurice a question, turning quickly towards him.

"Morry, do you know how old I am? . . . I don't believe you do. You don't know anything about me. Tell me how old you think I am?"

"I don't know a bit. You say you're older than I am. Older—it's just silly. Besides, I don't know how to guess."

"I'm thirty-two next birthday. What do you say to that?"

"It doesn't mean anything, nothing at all. You might as well say you were sixteen. You're eight years older than me if that's any comfort to you. But what on earth eight years can mean, I can't conceive. . . . I suppose they'd say you've got more experience than I have. . . . I think I've had a great deal. I used to be proud of it."

"Aren't you now?"

"It's not even real. It's not my past. I'm not proud of it. I'm not even ashamed of it. It just isn't mine."

To that she made no answer. Her past was real and



instant to her, and she hated it. She had lived too much controlled to be wholly lost in new and unprecedented happenings, and even though for hours she had forgotten everything, already the insurgent past clamoured its continuity with the present. She hated it, therefore. She could not explain this to him, because he would not understand all. Understanding less, he would be hurt.

"I know," she said, and he could only press her hand.

They were alone in the carriage. A few passengers seeking isolation glanced in through the window. One, less exacting, had turned the handle of the door to enter, idly staying his hand, looking sideways. They saw his face turned towards them, almost pushed against the glass, which touched and tilted the brim of his misshapen felt hat. Then it lit up with an amused half-smile of recognition. He shut the door again and walked on.

"Well. . . . What did he do that for?" said Maurice. "He must be a good sort. But I don't see how. . . . Oh, it must be pretty plain, I suppose."

"I'm sure we look the part. If a policeman came and said to me 'You're in love,' I should just have to say 'Yes.'"

"I believe a lot of people do recognise it," he said. "I should myself. I'm sure Mrs. Fitch—my landlady—suspected me when I left. I behaved sensibly, though. I shaved myself. It's very queer to look in a mirror like that. It was so quiet; my face didn't belong to me. I lost my nerve in the end;—cut a piece out of myself."

He was sitting in the corner opposite to her, his heart having failed him when he tried to obey the impulse to sit beside her. Even the unnecessary time spent in arranging their smaller properties, her rug, her umbrella, and her dressing-case, upon the netted rack had not been enough to determine him. To lessen the distance he himself had set between them he leaned forward, resting his elbows upon his knees; but she was remote behind the veil of

gloom drawn by the dingy gas-flame, leaning back and looking sideways out of the window. His failure to sit down at her side made him uneasy. He could not continue to tell of his sensations during the early evening; and while he halted in his words, he was apprehensive that she had turned away her face because of him.

Now he was afraid to cross the carriage and sit by her side. He should have done it instinctively, but the moment was past. The very thought of moving to her filled him with self-conscious terror, and he stared at the floor. How long would it be before she spoke to him? She would have to ask him why he was staring at the floor, and that would be an excuse for telling her that he wanted to sit beside her. Without her question, without her help, he could not.

Suddenly she said: "Why, what's the matter, Morry? What are you twisting your hands for? You're not nervous?"

He looked at his hands. They were clammy and hot, and he thought it was strange that she had noticed them. Then he lifted his head to look at her, smiling indecisively, as though he feared that she might be angry and hoped that she would see through everything.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said. "Do you really want to know what it is?"

"Of course."

"Well. . . . Oh, it's too silly. . . . You see, I wanted to sit beside you, and . . . I don't know. . . . I didn't do it at first when we came into the carriage. . . . Afterwards I couldn't. . . . I didn't dare."

"You child. Come over here." She held out her arms, and he came quickly, lowering his head. "It was just the same with me. I wanted you to sit beside me—I didn't dare to ask you, or to come over to you."

She slid her arm round his neck. He leaned against her, still looking at the floor. It was wonderful of her to excuse him like that, but it would not do. "It's no good," he

said. "It's not the same, really. You're only defending me. I ought to have done it, and you expected me to do it, didn't you?"

"You child. Why do you go on worrying at a tiny thing like that? It's only because you're shy of me. Only that."

His head rested upon her breast now, and he was contented by her words. Somehow they seemed true. And they made him feel happy and careless, oblivious of the past.

Moon was at the station to meet them. He had always had a fondness for Maurice. It rang in his greeting, "Here you are again, sir."

Maurice was quick with his explanation. "Hullo, Moon. I'm married. We've come down for our honeymoon. Anne, this is Moon. I've told you a lot about him."

"I hope it's to my credit, ma'am," said Moon, touching his hat to Anne.

"All of it," she answered, climbing up into the tall gig. Something in Maurice's pretendy off-hand words to Moon vaguely chilled her and the sensation was blent with the coldness of the Down air. She gathered herself together in her wraps.

The gig plunged out of the station light into the darkness. A few shreds of cloud wreathed about the moon set a far distance between the sky and the earth, between the gig and the world. A separateness had descended upon them. The few words that were spoken seemed to faint and fall before they had reached the hearer. Soon there was silence save for the swift and steady crunching of the road beneath the wheels and the clatter of the horse's hooves. Anne felt remote and strange. She was being hurried through a strange country with no purpose. She had surrendered herself to a mechanism which she could not control. Among the close-packed three she was completely defined and aloof.



Beneath the rug which covered them all Maurice's hand stole towards hers, and she took it deliberately between her own, suddenly aware of him nervous and anxious beside her. Though her action had been calculated, the contact dissolved the growing sense of separation. The thought of him as someone to be comforted and made secure overwhelmed her. The impulse she had hitherto dreaded, yet only half suppressed, to ask herself an account of her action, became less insistent.

"Is it much further?" she asked.

"No, not very far. A little over a mile. Not more than ten minutes," he added, fearful lest she were growing weary of the journey. "D'you see that light—there—over to the left? That's Moon's house. 'The Badger.' That's right, isn't it, Moon?"

"That's it, sir. We call it half a mile from Black Jack's triangle there. That's the piece of grass there, ma'am." He pointed with his whip to a shadowy island of coarse turf made by two grassy tracks and the road. "It's a queer name. They say he was a man who did things agin the law, sheep killin' or wool smugglin' or such-like, and they hung him high there."

"We're only a hundred yards behind 'The Badger,'" said Maurice, "but it's small and hidden from here. Besides, there's no light, of course. How should there be," his voice trailed into a disappointed silence. A bare dark cottage was no place for them to-night, for Anne. A vision of a cold and repellent reality presented itself and he feared that it would appear even barer and more repulsive to her.

"The missus put a light there, sir, and lit a fire," said Moon, after a pause. "It's not kindly to come to a cold house. She'd have done more, though, if she'd known that you were coming, ma'am."

Maurice felt much easier. The anxiety which had oppressed him during the ride began to abate, and as the last distance rolled quickly by the excitement of new

adventure was uppermost. He was taking a woman whom he seemed to know less with every hour of intimacy to a remote hiding-place, and she followed him. It was miraculous and incalculable. The wonder elated, while the sense of her incalculability and the tangled dimness of the future disquieted him.

He leaped quickly to the ground as the gig drew up by the gate and held a slightly trembling hand to Anne, who held it close. Together they went forward up the cobbled path, wet and fresh with the evening rain. Drops fell liquid from the bushes that rustled as they touched them. From the eaves they fell more slowly and heavier with an unfamiliar clinging sound, which changed even to the measured padding of a ghostly animal.

"It's very wet now," said Maurice, "but it's really a lovely garden—or rather a wilderness. You will see for yourself to-morrow."

"Yes."

The door had been left unlatched. The sunken fire illumined with a faint redness the bare floor, and tinged a bowl of white tulips on the table corner. Anne was not curious about the room, though she remarked the flowers. She was eagerly content to sit down in the large chair which Maurice pulled towards the fire. From outside came a dull plump as the last trunk descended from the cart, and then the sound of unsteady steps on the cobbles as Moon began his march up the path. Maurice was stowing away her wraps upon the hooks by the door.

Anne surprised him. He dropped her coat. Her arms had been flung with a gentle violence about him. "Oh, I am glad," she said, and kissed him. Moon was at the door. She ran with a childish shyness back to her chair, and remained still while the bags were taken through the room.

"I think everything's all right, sir," said Moon, "but my wife didn't get you any things in, because she didn't know what you might be bringing with you from London."

But of course we can let you have anything you want. We've always plenty."

"That's splendid. We didn't bring anything at all. We were in too much of a hurry. But I relied on you—as usual."

"I know, sir. But come along soon, if you can, sir, or shall I send some things across? It's getting towards our bedtime."

"Of course. I'll be round just after you. Thank you very much." The door closed.

Maurice went across to Anne, who sat as she was used, with her hands clasping the arms of her chair. He spent much of his courage in taking her two hands, and his question was very like a gasp, "Oh, will you like it?"

"Well, I can't see it very well?" she answered, slowly smiling, and then, "Of course I shall. I can't say anything quickly to-night. I'm in a curious mood. That's why I hesitated. Yes. I'm very romantic to-night. A princess of the plain, carried off by her mountain lover." She laughed at Maurice's incredulous face.

"There wasn't very much of that about it, was there?" he said. "I wish there had been more, don't you truly? . . . Except that . . . It wouldn't have been me . . . after all. . . ."

"No, it wouldn't have been you." She pulled him towards her and kissed him. "It's hardly the kind of thing I long for, either." A whimsical, wistful look passed over her face. "But you must go off to Mrs. Moon, now, mustn't you? It doesn't do to keep good people out of their beds. . . . Have you forgotten all about it already?" She held his face between her hands.

"I don't know . . . I seem to be very woolly to-day. I don't think we should ever have got here if it had been for me. I'll go now though. Let's make a blaze." Entering bodily into a cupboard he rummaged about for a moment and reappeared with an armful of wood which he threw on to the fire. It caught instantly, for it was very dry.



The flames had begun to shine on to some blue and white pots which stood in the chimney corner and on to the bowl of flowers. Dancing serpentine shadows of the tulips flickered over the wall against the fire.

Maurice paused at the door. "It's beautiful. You can't see yourself sitting there. Your hair's all goldy. . . . I shan't be many minutes. . . ."

Anne listened to the quick clatter of his feet down the path, then many softer steps fading away, while the gate swung to and fro over the latch. He must be running hard. "How like a child!" she said, and at the moment she loved him for that impetuosity. The warmth of the spiry flames, cloven tongues, ascending high before they passed to yellow-brown and streaming smoke, caressed her body, then passed almost burning about her face. She looked out of the window. A passing glimpse of the moon lit the drops on the laurel leaves within the small space of the window, and beyond them the misty darkness crowded low on the earth. How far she seemed and how completely her own, there by her own choice, and there her own mistress! There was indeed but little of the captured princess in her. She wondered whether she regretted it, as he so plainly did. A bewildering recollection of her afternoon resolve—that afternoon—came upon her. What was it had so suddenly changed her? His letter, his act—had he suddenly taken on the stature of a man and the capacity of a man's suffering? His running steps seemed still to sound in her ears. They were boyish, childish, as were his timid apprehensions in the train. He had not grown in a day. Strange that all her resolution had so instantly been forgotten! The truth was still the same. She would have to meet him, to advance towards him at every turn. She would be the giver and he the taker always—always?—for how long—for months of days, years of months, for ages of years. What was bigger than ages—centuries, they were not human. She stopped.

Yes, they would make a strange pair of lovers. Hers

was all the responsibility. But it was not very irksome. How deliberate and precise she could be about it! The phrase "educate him to love" entered into her thought, and she smiled. What a preposterous idea! Then she was perturbed at her own extreme of consciousness and longed to be rid of it. She awaited the sound of his returning steps in eager expectation. After a long while came the noise of a falling cinder, and after a yet longer interval, the faint rumour of a footfall, slow and heavy, pausing for a moment at the gate.

It was Maurice. The momentary fancy that he had grown old took hold of her as he came up the path towards the door. An instinct towards the prophetic and the ominous had time to enlarge upon it before she heard two strong knocks. Involuntarily she started as though they had been unexpected.

She opened the door. Maurice was apologetic. He had had to kick. He was wonderfully laden. Every pocket bulged and his arms were full of packages and cans.

"Will you put some of them on the table? You see I had to get such a lot of things. It took longer than I expected. I managed to set up house out of Mrs. Moon's cupboards. And then I very nearly forgot all about oil."

"How did you carry them?" She was angry with him for overburdening himself. "I'm sure you carried far too much. I had no idea you had so much to bring. I could easily have come with you. At any rate I'll not let you do it again."

"Oh, it's all right, really. I'm quite used to it. Why, I'm sure I carried as much as this last summer all the way from Pirford—in my knapsack." Completely unloaded, he stood with his back to the fire and leant his shoulders against the shelf. "I'm very happy," he burst out. "It's so exciting. I know the road to Moon's as well as anything, but it was all strange and splendid to-night. D'you feel like that at all?"

"I don't know. . . . Yes, I am excited . . . but far more relieved that you're back here. When the gate snapped, you might have been miles away. I was very lonely."

"But it won't be too lonely? You are going to like it?"

"Yes. Loneliness is one of my special moods. It comes on me suddenly, anywhere. It's one of my vices."

"It's a ghastly thing while it lasts. . . . I know."

She was hardly prepared to grant him the knowledge. Her loneliness was so intimate that she felt a breath of disparagement in his claim to her experience. He too felt dubious. Anxiety made him fumble with her precious secrets, and the thought that he was guilty of intrusion drove him to hesitating silence.

Incessantly urged to closer contact with her he bruised her. His innocence was nearly brutal. Yet he was sensitive to her lack of response and his own maladroitness. He took refuge in a nervous indifference that belied itself. He rolled back and forward against the mantelpiece and whistled.

"You haven't shown me the house yet," said Anne.

"I forget everything," he said despondingly.

Despite herself she laughed. "What a terrible exaggeration! Why, one can't be everything . . . Morry, you can't be. I know how it is. You're still frightened of me. You don't quite know how to handle me, and it makes you depressed. Don't you see that it's only a double burden? If I feel you're not happy, I'm miserable. If I feel you're not happy because of me it's twice as bad."

He slipped to his knees before her chair and rested his head on her lap. He didn't know what to say. Anne went on.

"Don't you see what it is? We're new to each other, not yet quite sure. I'm only beginning to get used to something strange in you. You're only beginning to get



used to a self-conscious woman. It's only a matter of hours before it will all pass. We shall be so close that we'll respond to each other instantly."

She stroked his tangled hair. He was close to her now, and her words bore less of definite meaning than of a comforting caress. They seemed to fall into a melody. Nevertheless he marked them, though they were hardly actual. How different things were after they had passed through her!

"You're like a purifying fire," he said, glancing up at her, shy at his phrase.

"What a beautiful thing to say to me!" She understood it. "It makes me feel so strong. . . . Morry, that was wonderful." She took his head in her hands and bent forward to kiss. He, looking up, wondered at the clean fine lines of her face, the dark hair swept straight across her forehead, the delicate motion of her nostrils as she breathed a little more deeply at his words, the dull glint of the thin coral necklace that sank on to her bosom. Her eyes were glistening and smiling at once. "I must be crying from sheer happiness," she said.

Why was she so happy? He had only said a little thing so very simply, he thought, looking back upon it. How could it have made her suddenly so happy? It was unaccountable, but he was content and calm in her happiness.

"We must go and look at the house," she said.

He held the candle high in the kitchen so that she might see the copper splendours of the pots that hung high on the walls. It was not a shabby kitchen. For all his metaphysical abstractions Richmond was careful to satisfy his keen appreciation of the dignity due to the mere regimen of life. "I wish I had more money," he used to say, "I would have my used possessions perfect." He always spoke with an elaborate care. One day he said: "You don't know, Maurice, how easy it is to degrade yourself in small things. It's a kind of infection, it will creep in any-

where. There's a quality in one's soul that comes directly from the polish on one's saucepans, believe me. I would rather spend nine hours on cleaning to be really free for the tenth, than scamp it in an hour, and have the nine for myself. They would feel to me gritty." Maurice, inclined to the same kind of fantastic speculations, had remembered this.

Therefore the cottage was intimate to Anne from this first inspection. Its simple delicacy comforted her while she climbed the narrow stairs behind him. Blake engravings loomed for an instant upon her from the stair wall.

"This is the big bedroom." She had had no more than the time to notice that several mirrors made it more of a woman's room than a man's, when Maurice entered a narrow room next door with a desk and some bookshelves. "This is my room," he said. He turned a key in a big box which stood in the corner, and pulled out a trellis on which a canvas mattress was stretched. "That's my own bed. I bought it. It all packs away in the daytime, so that I can have the room to myself. It's a good window." He pulled it open, inviting her to look outside, but she could only see the vast masses of black clouds outlined with dull silver, hardly to be distinguished from a deeper black nearer to the ground. "That's the woods. Dunton Copse it's called. You go about a half-mile further along the road to get into it."

"Are those your books?" she asked.

"Only some of them. Just these." He pointed to two rows on the top shelves. "All mine are in those rooms in London. I shall have to get them sent down some time or other, I suppose. It always takes a long while."

He was plainly proud of his room, and she asked him another question. "What colour are the walls? I can hardly tell in this light."

"They do cheat you," he agreed. "They're really a kind of blue. It's a bit purply though. . . . I did them myself—another of my inventions."

His was a curious little room, hardly a room at all, circumscribed by the quaint correctness of a wooden toy. It was rather a cell of infinite precision. "I like it," she said on the threshold, "very much."

Another room, the last, occupied all the front of the house, two-windowed and large. Save for a tiny rug and two chairs, one of which rocked for a moment at her touch, it was bare of furniture.

"This isn't anybody's room, really. Richmond couldn't afford to furnish it. But he intends to. It's really the best room of all. It has the morning sun, and looks straight on to the hills. It's a good room to talk in, even though it looks so bare."

Anticipating him she made haste to say that she liked the house extremely. It was true enough, but ordinarily she would have deliberated over a pronouncement so final. "I like to feel the house altogether," she used to say.

"It always seems to me beautiful," he averred.

Descending the stairs she felt the wall on each side with her hands, steadying herself for the steps were abrupt. The novelty of her surroundings was present to her still.

"I don't feel at all tired," she said.

"Nor I."

"But we ought to be tired. We must be. I think it's time for bed. Shall I make some tea first?"

"Let me. I like an evening brew."

"I'm going to make it though. I want to. Is there anything to eat? I'm beginning to feel hungry at the idea."

"There's bread and jam. Mrs. Moon gave us a cake too."

"Us?" she said, opening the big cupboard door and looking for cups. "I'm sure she gave it to you particularly. She would. But you'll have to give me some."

Returning from the garden with water, he found tea completely arranged. The arrangement had a certain particularity, centred in a single tulip taken from the



bowl and set in a tiny blue and white pot from the mantel-piece. He recognised the difference.

"How wonderfully you do it," he said, fixing the kettle on the glowing coals. "You must be used to it."

"I don't know. It's a thing that belongs to a woman."

. . . . .

"I don't like to leave this fire," said Maurice. He was squatting on the floor like a tailor. "But I suppose we must. We haven't even begun to talk about things."

"Far better talk in the morning. We agreed that we'd go directly after the tea. Already we must have spent another half-hour, without saying a word, just enjoying our laziness." She rose as she spoke, and lit the two candles which stood on the window-ledge.

"I have to make my bed," he said, when they reached the stair-head. "I think yours is all right."

"Do you know how to make one properly? I don't suppose you do." She led the way to his room. "Bring me the things."

"That's better than your idea," she said, giving the coverlet its final adjustment, and turned towards the door. "I think I'd better see about my own." He hesitated. Abruptly she turned and caught hold of him. "Won't you kiss me good night?" She had already kissed him, and now he had the courage to hold her close. Immediately his head sank on to her shoulder. "Are you so very tired? . . . You see I have to do everything," she said, laughing. "Good night, Morry."

"Good night, Anne."

. . . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

MAURICE listened to the sounds from Anne's room, while he undressed himself mechanically. The feeling that he had once more failed her oppressed him. To have done so now seemed like a culmination of failure. Why did he not go forward to meet her ? Instead, he had not the courage to do as he himself desired. He had lost her in a moment. In him there was a void, so that she found nothing where she expected to meet him. If only he knew what she thought, if only she knew how much self-accusation he had to endure, how much it cost him to do even what he did, then it would all be right. The assurance of her active sympathy was sufficient for him.

The sounds in her room ceased. She must have gone to bed now. A gust of wind penetrating through the chinks of the diamond glass, fluttered his candle. He wondered whether she was cold, and his mind rushed back to the warm comfort of the house at Kensington. He had thought it so natural that she should come with him that day ; miraculous, too, but by a strangely natural miracle, upon which he had at most moments during the last days securely counted. How far away she was in the other room ! He stared at the dim picture at the foot of his bed, and into the frame he put a vision of her as she lay there in the big room. The dark line which her hair made against the pillow was very clear. Her head would be resting upon her hand—that was indubitable. The vision was complete and by worlds remote from him, as he endeavoured to forge a bond between them, to bridge over the utterness of their parting at his door. The effort failed. In spite of all his anxious labour no relation could be made between the

wonderful being who lay there apart and him, staring at the picture over his bed foot. A passionate desire grew in him to pass over the abyss between them. If only—oh, why did he feel so helpless in their moments of intimacy? From them he brought nothing away to comfort him; only a conviction of his own insufficiency remained to make him lonely as he was now.

Now his every member was present to him, sharply contoured. The vivid lines that bounded him severed him from things beyond, and he was a speck in a vast circumambient universe. It seemed to him that he could hear, even watch his brain, ticking as a noisy clock, with a metallic sound that echoed into empty spaces beyond. Drowsy now, he contemplated it and listened. A slight shiver trembled over his body. He was cold, but he could not impel himself to move. Eyes shut, he listened to the noise of his own brain, which now confused with the throbbing of some pulse in his head. He was so tired that he enjoyed the constant, tiny check upon his desire to sleep.

A soft footfall made itself heard above the beat of his own blood. Half instinct, half conscious purpose held his eyes open only so far that he could see a blur between his lashes. The noisy latch lifted so quietly, the door moved so slowly that he was nearly frightened. Then he saw Anne on tiptoe moving towards him. So much beauty was apparent in her as she stood for a moment quite still beside him, a reticent loveliness of warm half-hidden lights, he was incredulous that she had come to him. Feigning sleep, he began to breathe more slowly, clutching the coverlet. Her hand was playing lightly with his hair, then was pressed hard on the pillow beside his head, while she bent down. She must be just looking at him, for he could feel the warmth of her slowly-given breath upon his cheek. Every little thread of it was distinct and perceptible to him. His nerves seemed separately to quiver with their sensitiveness, as though each smallest pulse of sensa-



tion, before lost in one indistinguishable, now for the first time had its own quality. Then she kissed him on the lips and whispered: "Morry, darling. . . . How like a little boy he is. . . ."

He moved in pretended sleep, and he could not prevent a smile of happiness from puckering his lips. For a second her hands were again touching lightly his hair; yet more lightly in fear to disturb him she touched his lips with hers and moved away. Listening, with eyes still shut, to retain her presence, he heard no sound of her return.

She had bathed him in herself; the comfort of her contact and caress wreathed in ascending waves, like a curling smoke, above him. The hardness which had circumscribed him gently obliterated and dissolved away. He became one with all that surrounded him; his consciousness ebbed out into his body and was lost.

He awoke suddenly into the deep dark. A nameless terror pressed upon him. Still dizzy he stood on the floor and shivered. Then he opened his door and went to hers. He knocked quickly and entered. Hardly noticing whether she were asleep or awake he hurried into the big bed, and curled close to her. Before he fell asleep he knew that she had kissed him and pressed him against her.

Anne watched him rub his eyes awake with screwed-up fists and thrust the overshadowing hair away from his forehead. Smiling with tender amusement she wondered what he would say. He, too, smiled with a dreamy recognition at her. Then he started. "O—oh," he said, and kept a startled silence for a moment, staring into her eyes as she lay beside him.

"Why," he said, "you've not slept at all."

"Oh, yes. I can't have been awake more than a half-hour."

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"Why should I? You were tired. The longer you slept the better."

"Wasn't it curious. . . . I mean me here beside you while you were awake?"

"Not so curious. Besides, I've been looking out of your window on to the fields. They're so beautiful."

He was ruminative and she laughed aloud. "You have a scared look about you. Are you wondering how you got here?"

"I wonder what the time is," he said inconsequently.

Anne reached across to the table by the bedside for a little travelling clock and placed it in his hands.

"My hat. It's just on ten." He whistled with an empty windy noise. "A good job I put out the can for the milk. Jim's gone two hours ago."

He sat upright, stretched his hands behind his head, and looked at her. The puzzled expression was still in his face.

"Well, what do you think of me?" he said at length, pausing with one foot still beneath the bedclothes. He did not wait for an answer, but ran to the door. "I'll have the downstairs done in a minute. It'll be all ready for you. I'm an expert. But," he added with his hand still on the latch, "we'll have to get somebody, sure we shall."

Anne was lazy for a little while, until she heard the sound of violent activities downstairs. Doors banged windy intervals in the noise of vigorous sweeping. A great cleanliness hung, slightly chill, about the house. It was a quicksilver day, and as the spring sun poured busily in through the uncurtained windows and fought amiably with the spring winds that pressed through the chinks there was to her vision something quicksilver in the whole situation. An active, elusive principle was eagerly at work, escaping the grasp. On a moment everything seemed to change its quality. Soon it would be just a windy game, and she a girl. A quick clattering of cans below tinkled accompaniment. She was very gay at heart, and once out of bed, she dressed with an exciting swiftness, and hurried down.

Maurice was sweeping ashes from the fire, but he turned

as she came into the room. "You did look lovely this morning," he said without a pause in his sweeping.

"Did I?" A naïve answer to this disconcerting attack shaped involuntarily. "I didn't know." She hesitated where she stood, vaguely expecting that he would regard her closely. She had dressed in something he had not seen before, in a long blue gown, shaped close to her waist and body, descending to an amplitude of skirt. She knew it was beautiful.

"What shall I do?" she asked as he took up his bucket. "Get the breakfast?"

"Will you? That would be splendid. I shall be over with mine in a quarter of an hour." He hurried out into the back garden; the creaking of a pump handle and much cold splashing followed his exit.

Breakfast done, they sat talking in front of the fire.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" said Anne.

Maurice was taken aback. "There's lots of things," he explained generally.

"Tell me then."

"Why, we've got to clear up for to-day. Then we'll have to go and find somebody to come in and look after us. And there's lunch and dinner. A general round-up wouldn't be a bad thing, would it?"

"I don't quite mean these things. They're taken for granted. I mean rather . . ."

"Oh, I see. Well, I thought it would be fine if we went for a long walk this afternoon. I want to show you all the place about. Besides, we could go in and see Mrs. Fletcher at Stackling on the way."

"Who's Mrs. Fletcher?"

"She's the woman who used to do for Richmond and me when we were here. She lives at Stackling. That's not more than a mile and a half along by the path, and there's a gorgeous road on to the hills from there. Not a real road of course, all overgrown, supposed to have been a smugglers' way. I like that kind of thing."



Anne was persistent with her question.

"That's to-day. But what are we going to do the other days? I mean . . ." She leant forward on the table with her chin on her hands.

"I never thought about that."

"I don't know why I did. But it suddenly struck me."

"Well, it won't be so very different from what it was in London. I never really had anything to do there, you see. I mean that I didn't make any money. I managed to live of course. No one has ever given me money or made me an allowance or anything of that kind. I make a little in between whiles by doing little jobs for papers. Cradock used to get me some." He looked at her with surprised discovery. "I suppose that's all over now. That's funny. It's quite hard to get the hang of things. This business of ours seems so complete in itself that it's difficult to imagine that it has anything to do with other people at all. Can you believe that lots of people will be talking about us; fairly dropping on us? That's so curious," he went on without a pause. "Can't see why they should. They've suddenly all become unreal, and they weren't very real to me before. Are they real or unreal to you?"

Anne nodded her head slowly. "Not real at all."

"Do you know," he said, "this is the first time that I've realised that we've done something? I knew that it was all wonderful, but there was something so natural in it all. . . . I never dreamed till now that we were making an event for other people. My hat, we've been and gone and done it." He wagged his head for a little while. "Yes, we have," he said. "Are you glad?"

"Yes," said Anne. She did not want to interrupt him. She hardly knew whether to be sorry that he had understood so little what she herself had done, or to be happy because he was so spontaneous. She was frightened rather by the depth and sincerity of his natural self-absorption. They were like two circles that had been

important in her algebra, she thought, one wholly containing the other.

"What was it we were talking about?" he said abruptly. "Oh, what we were going to do. I think I shall go on in much the same way. I read an awful lot. I don't know that I do much besides. I seem to have spent all my time talking, mostly to Dennis. But then I don't see such a great deal of him, not so much as I would like. I wonder what I spend most time at," he said disingenuously. "Of course I do try to write other things."

How quickly the "we" had whittled down to the "I," Anne thought. It had not occurred to him that she would have to do something. Why should it? If he did not think about it naturally, far better not think about it at all. After all there was no problem as regards herself, and therefore no need for his help in its solution. It was simple for her to continue as she had been, but with the old restraints and vexations gone.

He was looking out of the window. "Why, there's a month's hard labour in the garden alone. It's worth making perfect. Do you know a lot about gardening?"

"Something, not very much. Perhaps enough to manage the garden here. We can make a beginning to-day." She, too, glanced out of the window, looking sideways at his face. He seemed to be thinking about nothing at all. "Do you like music?" she asked.

He pondered for an instant. "I don't know, honestly. I only have music by fits and starts, and it's hard to tell. Sometimes I like it very much. But there's this certain fact. I've never been to a concert of my own choice. Why, do you?"

"Yes, very much."

"It's a pity. You can't get very much in the country, can you?"

"Another thing," said Anne, "how are we for money?"

"That's been at the back of my mind for the last hour. One thing, it's very cheap living here. I've got quite a lot

—for me—in the bank, over forty pounds. That will last a long while. Three months, at least. I dare say I shall make some more during that time. I must,” he said, rising from his chair and standing beside her.

Anne laid her hands on his arm. “I was teasing you,” she said. “I’ve got a lot of money. I forget quite how much. Besides, it’s never quite the same. But it’s nearly three hundred pounds a year. That’s five pounds a week, and it belongs to me. Yes, five pounds a week.”

“Six,” said Maurice.

“Oh, that’s why there always seems to be something over. I make a rule never to spend more than five pounds a week. So there’s nothing to worry about, is there?”

“No,” he said dubiously. “What an awful lot of money! I should never be able to earn as much, never.”

“Why should you? Isn’t it as much yours as mine?” She stood up and put her arms round him. His lips were pouting.

“It doesn’t seem fair,” he said.

“How not fair? If you had the money, you’d give me half, wouldn’t you?”

“You know I would.”

“Well, then.”

He was hardly convinced, but enough convinced to allow him to begin to clear up. “At all events we can afford a servant,” she said, as she pushed him quietly aside and piled the tray herself.

. . . . .

They were slowly climbing the smugglers’ road. The freshness of the clean air, the bright flashes of green and yellow from the new turf and the gorse buds, sent a careless consciousness of their own active bodies through them, and overwhelmed the lingering half-taste of a difference.

“Do you think she will do for us?” said Maurice.

At the bottom of the lane hidden by the copse which they had just skirted was Mrs. Fletcher’s house. She would



come herself of course if Mr. Temple preferred, but would he mind if her daughter came instead? Then Mrs. Fletcher had addressed Anne and informed her that Alice had never been out before, but that she knew all about cleaning and cooking. "At least, all that I have to teach her, m'm." Alice had appeared, blushing, with an unexpected curtsy for Anne, and it had been then and there agreed that Alice should begin to-morrow.

"I think, admirably. I wonder if she will go on curtseying in the house. She can't very well, if she's carrying things."

"No. I'm sure she'll work hard. Mrs. Fletcher has taught her that, I bet. Did you see her pots and pans in the kitchen? But you didn't come in. Why not?"

"I saw them shining even through the window. I didn't like to go in. I'm always afraid that I shall intrude." She saw that he was wondering whether he had intruded. "It's different for you. You know them very well. Besides, you're not half so self-conscious as I am."

"I always think I'm the self-conscious one."

"That's not so really. You weren't in the least self-conscious with Mrs. Fletcher, were you?"

"No—now that I come to think—it never occurred to me."

"That's it, and I'm sure you never have been. You can forget about it all quite easily, if you have the right people. If you have to do with people who are natural, you are perfectly natural yourself. I hardly ever forget myself entirely. It's not quite what you would call self-consciousness. I always hold something in reserve. I never give quite enough of myself to be able to ignore other people's rights. I don't go into Mrs. Fletcher's house because I haven't taken her into mine. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes. Still I don't think Mrs. Fletcher ever dreamed of looking at it from that point of view."

"Nor I, of course. I'm really finding out about myself. If I did go in I should have very likely to behave much

more amiably than I felt. Besides, I always get cross when I'm treated as a being from another world. People like Mrs. Fletcher never are quite comfortable with me. It doesn't make any odds whether I'm very nice, or overflowing with *hauteur*. They always think that I'm doing them a kindness, and that makes me angry. Oh! I've learnt it by long experience."

"It's strange how different we are in things like this." At the edge of an old chalk-pit they paused and looked back into the copse, which now began to hide the black of its wood in the greenness of the new leaves, on to the road which curled white round the hill foot till it guided their eyes to their own cottage.

"Who's more to be envied?" asked Anne.

"You."

"I don't think so. The people who like you like you much more than they would me. And there can't be any people who don't like you. They don't have time to. You're scared off."

An undecided smile flickered over his lips. "I can't help it."

"Of course you can't. But I'm amazed that Jim didn't scare you. You went to ask him for work, didn't you? I've always been told he's terrible in the office."

"Oh, that was funny. I sent up my name; but someone must have made a mistake, and gone to the wrong room. At all events he wasn't expecting anybody. When I got to his room I tapped ever so lightly on the door and slid in. You don't know how quiet I can be when I'm nervous. He was behind a tall desk so that he couldn't see me unless he looked up deliberately. I must have sat in the chair twenty minutes before he noticed me. He was immensely surprised. Then he burst out laughing. After that he must have felt sorry for me or something. He was very decent; gave me some tea; and sent me away with a book under my arm. After that day he was always rather amused with me."

"Oh, I can see him," said Anne. "It was exactly like him. But didn't he say 'By God, man,' when he noticed you?"

"Yes, he did. I'd forgotten that."

"I knew he would."

Maurice was perplexed and awkward while Anne spoke of Cradock. He couldn't understand how she could speak of him so easily. Therefore, he dug holes in the turf with his stick and busied himself in constructing a pattern.

"It's rather sad that a woman can't live by respecting a man," she said as though to herself. But she had spoken to him, for she asked, "Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," he said shyly.

"Have you begun to wonder why I left him so easily?"

"I'd just begun to think about it." Now that he did, it puzzled him. He had liked Cradock. Particularly on the night of the dinner-party he had admired the way Cradock had treated his wife. There was a kind of natural courtesy, a real respect, in his behaviour. Of course it would have been hard to be intimate with Cradock. That he realised by comparing him with Dennis. But still . . . there was something decent about Cradock.

"Let's go on now," said Anne. "I would like an early tea." They walked across the slope of the hill hand in hand. "It's really much simpler to understand if you don't think about it, I believe," she said. "It seems to me so very obvious; yet it would be quite hard to explain."

Maurice followed her instantly. He felt that they, walking along together, were so extraordinarily just and right, that it was only a waste of time to bother about things before. From her he felt a growing conviction of sanity that warmed him and slowly welled into a sense of triumph. His grasp of her hand tightened. He faced her and quickly wound her tight in his arms, kissing her passionately.



Almost before their lips had met the burning impulse had chilled to ashes in him. He could not lose himself in her. He saw her eyes closed, her head bent back. He saw everything. Above all he saw himself, deliberate and conscious.

He shut his eyes that the actual things around might not become an obsession. In a moment they were clearer, harder, more instant in his vision. The broken fairy rings of deep green grass were definite as diagrams; the gnarled trunk of an oak made one clear contorted line. He had seen them blindly but a minute before, now they pressed into his consciousness, tyrannical. Anne disengaged herself from him, and he stood gazing at the ground, mute, oppressed and trembling. A vast was between them.

"I'm—sorry," he faltered.

It was past bearing. Quick anger rose in Anne. Dull fought with the bright in her eyes. "Oh, why? . . . You torture me. . . ." She clenched her hands by her sides, panting breath crowded through her nostrils. Her lips pressed nervously together. He did not lift his eyes, and as she looked at him, her strength and her anger died in her, like a wind that drops and leaves the sail fluttering empty against the mast. For her weakness she could have fallen. She reached for his hand.

"Let's go home, now," she said. A shudder shook him so violently that his hand trembled in hers. She held it tighter. "Let's go, Morry."

He strode quickly on the downhill path. The jar of each step was a relief to him. The spring sun wheeling to its setting in a blaze of light mocked them both. A dead fire burned within him. He must do something. He ought to cry. "Oh, God," he moaned.

The note of the words told Anne that he had passed away from her. "Don't," she said. "It's nothing." He stood stock still, facing her.

"Oh, no. It's nothing. . . . It's just me." He trembled

only a little from fatigue, but the tremor was perceptible in his speech. "I fail . . . just fail . . ."

"Don't—don't speak like that." She despaired that ever her voice would carry down the void and reach him.

"You don't want me—now."

"Morry."

She let his head rest upon her shoulder, glad, unutterably glad of the burden. Upon them both a wide peace descended.

"Let us go now," she said quietly.

"Yes." He caught her hand and kissed it, resting his lips upon it for a long while, then, saying nothing, they set out for home.

Sitting in the house while the darkness slowly gathered about them they breathed an exquisite calm. For a while it was common to them both. More than the rest after long physical fatigue was the conscious delight of the body, but lately threatened and agitated by the mind, in the mind's peace. In Maurice it passed imperceptibly into a keen contentment. The struggle was finally ended and he was free. The bond between himself now and himself of two hours ago slipped easily from him. Remembering events, not feelings, he wondered aloud.

"How strange that was. Wasn't it awful while it lasted, Anne?"

"Yes," she said quickly. She had been stabbed again.

"I can't think of it if I want to. I can see us there on the hill, by the old oak and the fairy rings, but I can't get nearer to it. It's only a picture. But it's ghastly."

"Yes, . . . it's hard to recall." Anne was hurt that the memory had so wholly faded for him. To herself it was very present. The words he had spoken echoed in her. For a moment she wondered in which Maurice she was to believe, for, she thought, it would be hard to hold them both. She could never go through it again. The sound

of his careless voice almost convinced her that she would never need to.

"Are you going to write to Jim?" he asked.

"Yes. . . . Why do you ask?"

"I was only curious. Won't it be rather a job? I'm just thinking about things again, wondering what'll be in his mind now. It seems a shame that you should have the business of writing while I don't have anything."

"I don't think about it very much," she said. "A letter to Jim now is rather like any other letter. I don't want to hurt him, but if I must, well, I can't let it worry me deeply. It wouldn't in any case."

"No, of course not," he said, as though he saw the matter under a new aspect.

"I think I'll write now. It'll catch the evening post, won't it?"

Maurice looked up at the clock. "If you finish in half an hour, easily." He went upstairs, while she cleared a space upon the table for herself, into which she arranged the pad and paper which he brought down.

"I'll wash the tea-things," he said, dimly suspecting that this was an occasion on which she should be left alone. He left the room with the tray.

He wondered what she was saying in her letter, though he tried to convince himself that it didn't really matter. A little spark of resentment that Anne should be busying herself with another person than him kindled. What was the good of knowing? he thought; but still he desired to know. That he would not dare to ask her to let him see only sharpened his desire. He made a great noise as he put the china away on the dresser, for thus he managed to assert his presence and his personality. Seeing that he would have to go out to the post-box, he felt grudging about it. The thought that a half-mile walk deserved a sight of the letter was at the bottom of his mind, but he managed not to present the equation to himself in that



shape. Nevertheless, he could not help feeling that he was being hardly treated.

"Morry, you've surely finished. Come here!" Anne's call took him by surprise. He had to justify himself. He wiped down an already clean table, and folded the cloth which had been better hung to dry.

"Just a moment. I'm hanging up the cloths," he said, and after a pause entered.

"Would you like to read it?" she said.

He was at a loss to reply. "What—the letter?" He could not avoid betraying his surprise. "No—o. Why should I?"

She passed it across the table to him. "I think you had better. It's our letter, after all, rather than mine."

"If you please, I'd rather not, really," he said. "I don't want to."

"Perhaps you're right." Then she said, half to herself, "It's my own responsibility anyhow."

"Oh, no. It's not that," he put in anxiously.

"Well, what is it then?" she asked.

"I don't know." He made a curious little gesture with his head, as though he tried to shake off something that clung to him. "I don't," he protested.

At that Anne sealed the envelope. "It's not very important one way or the other," she said. "And there's no great hurry about sending it. It's not very pleasant going to the post at this time in the evening."

"I'd like to go," he said stubbornly. "Besides, I want to send a letter myself. I have just got time to write it."

"To whom?"

"To Dennis. Don't you think we might ask him down?" He was already writing at the table. After a little while he stopped to remark: "I think Dennis likes you very much. I suppose he likes me. I wonder if he would like us both?"

"I wonder. Yes, ask him down."

During his absence, Anne's thought was turned inevitably to the afternoon. In the few minutes' solitude

she could detach herself and consider. But not even yet had the sense of desolation, of sudden abandonment, completely passed away. She had always been isolated, since she could remember, but the isolation had always been of her own seeking and creation. To-day she had been flung off by eternity. She reconstructed the moment. It was in outline so plain. The second of utter surrender to their full love, the instant torment of self-consciousness that had flowed from him to her immediately and stung her naked nerves, his agony of self-accusation. It was that which froze her. While he wrestled with himself she was as nothing, yet he was the cause of his own agony. What did that matter? He should have the courage of his own desire. Should, should? Why should he? He would not be himself. Being himself, he could not. It was something new to him, this sudden incandescence of love. New? it was rather as though he had passed his life in blowing cold upon his own flame at its whitest. Twenty-four years. A boy. Every word he spoke, every gesture he made revealed it. Every word but those, every gesture but that. He became old in a moment and passed as quickly back to a boy. Was it her fault that he evaded her? She was the occasion. She should come nearer to meet him. Somehow she must come closer to him yet, anticipate his reactions. Yes, she had said the truth. She did not give utterly; something of herself held back frightened him as it were a judgment. It was she who failed, not he.

Mere words! she had performed miracles of giving, opened herself so wide to him that she was tired of giving; not tired, but fearful of the brutality in him, that was never far away. She would give to the man and find the child. Suddenly she seemed to understand.

She could not always be conscious. Against certain things the reaction was instant and unreasoned. In her life so much had been lifted out of instinct into consciousness, so much effort expended on the change, that what

remained was irreducible. It was an unchangeable condition of her being. If she gave more, the whole would be play-acting. If she offered more of herself, then she must harden herself against the wounds he would inflict, and hardened, she would not be giving, she would not even be herself. For a little while she thought that she had shirked her own conclusions, but over her thought there hung the misty assurance that there were no conclusions. Through the mist penetrated the feeling that she had failed him, beyond which, though she strove to weaken it by the thought that it had been born of her thinking, she could not reach. Therefore she was sad, and tender to Maurice when he entered the room once more.

She had placed a low stool against her chair before the fire, and she motioned him to it. First, he dropped his chin upon his hands and bent forward to watch the fire, but in a moment he leaned his head sideways upon her lap and played with the silver buckle of her shoe.

"The latchet of whose shoes," he said dreamily. "I am not worthy . . . Don't say 'no.' I've been thinking about us on my way back to-night. It wasn't Judas who said that though, was it? That would make it better still." He was turned about now. His head rested on his arms, and they upon her lap. "How I betray you. I wonder if I shall go on doing it?"

"Betray me. How?" she asked quietly.

"All kinds of ways. More than I know even. I know you expect me and I'm not there, time after time. You know what I mean. You must. When I want you you are always there, always."

"Always? This afternoon?" The mournful melody of the words was strange to him, and he looked up at her. Sad and tired, tender and smiling—how wonderful she looked!

"Why do you say it like that?"

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know."

"But I failed this afternoon. The one thing *I* can't for-



get is the way I knew. It was like a revelation, absolutely certain." To that she could say nothing. He might understand, but she could not explain. "I knew something else," he continued, "I shall always depend on you."

"But you can't always, can you? Besides, you don't really want to. Only a half of you does."

"Yes," he said slowly, "I suppose that's right."

"It's true—and it's right."

"You do seem to know a lot about me, Anne."

"Not very much."

"How much?"

"A very little. Don't worry me." She smiled at him.

"As much as I know about myself?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

"Yes, you do. I know you do. More than I know about myself. Tell me."

"Perhaps. How can I tell you?"

"I think you do," he said. "Was I really worrying?"

"Not really. . . . But how could I answer you?"

"Couldn't you?"

"Yes, I could answer you. But you didn't want my answer, you wanted your own. Shall I tell you what you really wanted me to say?"

"Yes, please."

"You wanted me to say that I knew all about you. Isn't that true?"

"I don't know. I have to think. . . . Perhaps. . . . Yes. . . . Why didn't you say it then? You might as well, mightn't you?"

"No. You see it wasn't true."

"Not really?"

"No," she said, and shook her head deliberately.

"I wish to God you did. I wouldn't mind not knowing myself then, you see. . . . Oh, Anne darling. . . ."

The evening moved naturally to its close. Naturally, without hesitations, he went to her room. He curled up so as to be small beside her, and his head lay in the warm

comfort of her breast. Sleepy soon, he emerged with one last question :

“Did you ever snuggle up, when you were small ? ”

“Yes,” she said. It was not her word, but she understood and kissed him.

## CHAPTER IX

DENNIS BEAUCHAMP was thoroughgoing. As outwardly he never showed surprise, so inwardly, though he was alone in his room at the hospital, he refused to allow that Temple's letter was unexpected. Propping it against the coffee-pot he continued to drink, and read the letter again.

"So that's all right," he said.

But he felt that another cubit had been taken from his stature. Suddenly, Maurice had done something, quite definite. Unmistakably he had made a step. Forward or backward, right or wrong, did not matter. He had emerged from the vague background of desires and ideals and committed himself to an action. A tinge of envious resentment clouded Dennis's contemplation. He could not help accusing himself, and his self-directed shafts had a keen, particular barb. Maurice had done something that he himself might have done, and thus had closed one possible avenue of escape for him. He had quite as good a right to run away with Anne Cradock as Maurice, a better right, for he understood her better. She was clear before him as she had been in her drawing-room on the afternoon three days ago, and as the picture took on a sharper reality, he thought with a half-smile that he hadn't any very considerable right to her. None at all, in fact. But he might have created it. The idea of himself as the stern, silent, insistent lover quickly engaged him, almost before he had time to laugh at himself for being ridiculous. Anne Cradock was a little too good to be handled in that way. She would see through it and laugh before he could say the first masterful word. Her amused smile was infectious. He was laughing with her now.



He was rather grieved with things in general because he was not permitted to take himself seriously. After all, there was the fact. Anne Cradock had gone away into the country with Maurice, because she pitied him. And he was to be pitied. His depressions, his insecurities, were overwhelming. Dennis himself had felt that many times. Nevertheless, his own title to pity was at least equal to Temple's. For a moment he thought that he might have made himself as convincing, and he began to reproach himself for having neglected an opportunity. But no sooner had he run his idea a little way than a vision of Anne Cradock appeared smiling at him with understanding amusement. "It's no use, Dennis—another orgy of self-pity." Not the slightest use, he hastened to agree.

The difference was that he was older than Maurice. But Anne was not the person to run away with a young man just because he was young. "I give it up," he said aloud. A suspicion entered into him that he had not rightly understood Maurice, and he could not banish it, although he was certainly not prepared to grant that it even might be true. It was very fortunate that he had been invited down, for now he was urgent to see Maurice and to search him out. With some surprise he recollected that Anne would be there too. Maurice had been isolated in his thought till then. Yes, he wanted to see them very much indeed.

A clamorous bell called him away for a few minutes to consult with a fellow house-surgeon. Clear, with an impressive conviction, he soon persuaded Richards to the opposite of his formed opinion, and Richards admired him for it.

"By Jove, I never thought of that."

"Nor I, till now," said Dennis.

"Is that so, really?"

"The fact. Look here, Richards. Do you mind if you let me have the next free week-end? It's yours really, I know. But I very much want to see a friend, and I may not have another opportunity. Let's see. To-day's Tues-

day. I'll do your night turn for the rest of the week if it will be any good to you."

Richards was very pleased to be asked. Dennis hardly ever wanted an extra week-end, while he was always asking Dennis to change.

"Of course. Only too pleased. But why do the night duty? I'm all right. . . . But if you take my turn on Thursday, I'd be very much obliged."

"Certainly. Thanks very much. I haven't quite finished my breakfast." He pulled out his watch. "Only twenty minutes before that lecture. I must be off. Good-bye."

He turned over the pages of a book of lecture notes. His were held to be very brilliant lectures, and he idly wondered whether the world had a pitiful capacity for self-deception. The mathematical regularity of his handwriting was appropriate to the utter remoteness of the matter of his analysis. It was so indifferent to him that its appeal to his medical contemporaries was unintelligible. He speculated whether the bubble of his reputation would suddenly burst. At all times during the last three years the idea had haunted him, but that consummation was, he suspected, past hoping for. The stuff was right, for it had been written at a time when he had been interested to make it right. What baffled him was that the lectures could be important to anybody else, they were so unimportant to him.

Nevertheless, as the time for the class approached, an indefinable unction descended upon him, anticipating his controlled and unconcerned attitudes at the lectern. There was an insidious enjoyment to be derived from his undoubted efficiency *ex cathedra*, and the satisfaction of standing before an audience intent upon his every word warmed him, although he would not acknowledge it to himself. Instead, he preferred to insist upon the base motives which prompted their attention, their hopes of passing sterile examinations for useless ends. Of course there was something in it all. Occasionally he felt that

himself, but that any member of his audience should be concerned with the realities which here dimly foreshadowed in the obscurer physiological facts with which he dealt he refused to allow. It would savour too much of a criticism upon himself.

He had been speaking a long while on the functions of the optic nerve. In front of him was one row after another of bended heads, the noise of many pens. In the attitude interest seemed to have been concentrated into indifference. A puff of anger and disgust swept into him.

"Of course," he said, "you must remember that all I have been saying is only an approximation to a truth which cannot be conveyed in such terms as these. It would be more correct and more honest if I were to acknowledge here and now that this approach, the normal medical approach, to psychology is only a *pis-aller*. One forgets so soon in the excitement of research—I myself so soon forget—that the clumsy word psychology has degraded the object of which it professes to be the science. It is like a black cloud poured about the reality, which is the soul. We explain and explain, we spend our skill in mapping out the ducts and channels of sensation in the human body—and what more do we know of the soul? The thing eludes the finger of science from the beginning." He looked up from his desk to the same expanse of bended heads, and irritation seized him. "Please do not take this down. It will be of no practical use to you." A malicious desire to destroy the construction which he had so laboriously built up for them urged him on.

"We speak of a sensation being communicated along a nerve fibre. We point out these nerve fibres on a chart, and follow them out in the dissecting-room. We imagine we have said something of account concerning them. What is the fact of the matter? By our use of the word sensation we have begged the whole question. What is a sensation but something which has been present to our consciousness? How can this something be communicated



along a nerve-fibre ? An electrical current passes along a wire until it arrives at a point where the wire is so thin that it becomes incandescent, and we are aware of the presence of the electrical current. That is at least intelligible. But it is the grossest deception when we imagine that sensation can be similarly explained. At one end of the wire is the electrical current, at the other end still electrical current. At one end of the nerve-fibre is some material stimulus, at the other end a sensation, painful or pleasant. And what is a sensation ? Something at any rate of which we are conscious, for otherwise it could not be. A miracle has occurred. Material shock has been communicated, and it ends in consciousness of material shock. Between these two things is an abyss. Physiology is so lucid concerning the mechanism of sensation only because it takes account of nothing but mechanism. In other words, it ignores entirely the abyss between stimulus and consciousness of stimulus. What kind of an explanation can that be where there is no conception of the thing to be explained ? It is a delusion.

“It is easy to leave the problem on one side and to say we cannot afford to worry about that. There is the fact anyhow. We have bodies and we have consciousness. If it is no use trying to explain the connection, you will say for Heaven’s sake let us get on with something tangible. That is what I have been trying to do here. But the trouble is that once you approach the question from the other side the impossibility of finding a solution to it is overwhelming. Of course for a great part of the day, we do not worry about it. We just accept the fact that we are conscious beings and are grateful. Then we are happy and to be envied, for the problem does not exist ; in the deepest sense of the words, it does not exist. That is the way of health. Unfortunately we have begun to be self-conscious. We desire to know things because we desire the truth, and since medical knowledge, one-sided and blind as much of it may be, is nevertheless knowledge, it concerns us deeply to

know what manner of truth it is at which we may hope to arrive by this road. We aim at truth ; we are doomed to arrive at something which is at once untrue and true, accurate and false. It is as though we should endeavour to appreciate

‘ When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up the memory of things past ’

by reading it in a German translation. There is no dictionary of the spirit in which sign and meaning correspond each to each. It is given to us as a whole and must be apprehended as a whole.

“That is why the dualism of the living being has no problem for us, so long as we do not worry about it. Having worried about it, I can forget it when I lie on my back in the grass. I am easily conscious of myself as a living individual. The old problem has disappeared. Immediately a new distracts me. I am set apart in a surrounding universe which rejects me, and to which I cannot reach. In place of the old abyss a new and greater one. Perhaps you have not felt that. I am sure that you will at one time or another be thrown back absolutely upon yourselves, and then you will be oppressed by a question more profound than any that medical science or even medical psychology will ever set to you.”

He had not been carried away, and a nice appreciation of the appropriate pause did not wholly desert him. “I am afraid that I have allowed myself to be taken outside my subject. I do not think that it is worth while to talk about a form of metaphysical depression in a lecture upon the optic nerve. In fact I cannot see that it will be of any use at all to you—except perhaps those of you who are interested in mental pathology.”

As he hurried out of the room he was not unpleasantly aware of a general mystification. He had meant to do something rather extraordinary though he had not done it deliberately. It gave some relief to his mood of the morn-

ing. He desired more. Looking at his memorandum he was glad to find that there was nothing more to do until the afternoon, and he hurried outside. A wet wind blew the rain in white spray upon the hospital steps. He ran back to fetch a raincoat, going deviously to his room in order to avoid any curious questions from his friends upon the finale of his lecture. He might be explosive.

His breakfast things were still upon the table, and leaning against the coffee-pot was Temple's letter. It gave him a clear idea for action that morning, and he was titillated by a half-malicious pleasure at the thought of going to see Cradock. Anxious to be certain of finding him, he called him up on the lobby telephone. Cradock was at the office.

"I wanted to see you very much. Let's lunch together, somewhere where we can talk."

"Why, is there anything the matter?" answered Dennis with native diplomacy.

"No-o. Well, yes. It's about Anne. A bad business. I want to talk to you. You'll come to the club. I'll tell you about it."

"Very well, I'll be there."

"How I hate London," he said as he descended the great steps, hunching up his shoulders, burying his face in his coat collar, so that he might be a small target to the rain that drove against him, while the big drops from the avenue of stubborn plane trees fell with a heavy plop upon his shoulders. When he had leaped on to a bus under the dark and dirty station arches, his hatred did not prevent him from watching with interest the unremitting hail and farewell of the passengers. He was more impatient than the conductor to be onwards. With him he seemed to tug violently at the bell-pull before the passengers had descended. He raged against the city traffic which held them prisoners. The sharp ting-a-ting of the agitated bell found a responsive echo in him. Slowly subsiding into apathy, he began to be aware that some one



was talking close beside him. He turned away from the door, yet did not commit himself to a point-blank stare. It was a little woman in worn and rain-spotted black, holding an umbrella in a nervous hand covered with thin black cotton gloves. Stealthily he worked upwards towards her face. Beady, half-animal eyes, a square-set chin and mouth deeply lined and angular, but softened with a certain timid tenderness. She was but half seated as though impatient to leave the omnibus.

Dennis listened to what she was saying, and a little uneasy because he could not be sure whether she was already addressing herself to him. With his usual apprehension he looked distances, and listened.

"Five million of 'em every year. There's Yerkes. He had millions of money, millions. And he died five years back, dead. And what good did his money do him? Oh, yes, it's all very well to have gold and palaces, all very well, but will it save you a moment or turn it away? No!"

The word was fired out with a report that all the omnibus could hear. A young man with large restless hands and a top-hat pushed commercially to the back of his head tittered, and glanced from side to side for support. A woman in the corner, with two sharply defined circles of red on her cheeks, holding a portfolio in her hand, leaned her chin upon her umbrella and looked fixedly with the expression of a communicant soul at the little lady in black. Dennis, deeply perturbed by a vicarious embarrassment, gazed rigidly at the conductor.

Abruptly she burst into a long list of names of cities. Lima, he heard, and Bahia and Buenos Ayres. "There's lots of money there," she said, "but I've seen 'em die like flies." Then she spoke, fluent with passion, a liquid gasping language that he judged to be Spanish. Dennis was almost proud of having distinguished it. Finally in a tone of impotent despair some quick muttered French, of which he was not enough alert to catch the words, save the

final sentence, "*Et de mener une vie toujours comme ça, toujours pareille, toujours.*" He was impelled to look at her with intent, to show that he had understood and appreciated. The little lady was staring out of the window, unconscious of him, holding her umbrella tight in her black gloved hand, shifting uneasily upon her seat. He had hardly a moment to watch her lips move with inaudible speech, before she had descended after a hesitation on the footboard, to the pavement.

Speculations as to what she might be, thenceforward engaged him. He found himself incessantly repeating her final phrase, "*Et de mener une vie toujours comme ça, toujours pareille, toujours.*" A melancholy lilt in the sentence fascinated him, and while he muttered it he forgot its meaning. His turn, too, came to descend. As he stood on the footboard the sudden thought came to him that it was appropriate to himself, and he stood on the kerb immobile, afflicted by doubts. The woman might have spoken to him with purpose.

A newsboy running in the gutter brushed against him and rushed on crying his special edition. "What the devil . . ." said Dennis. He felt that he towered above, aloof from the *canaille*. What did they know about the things that troubled him? Just a few sparks struck out of the lower darkness, one or two scattered points of fitful incandescence, aware of each for a moment and gone into the nothingness whence they came. God, what a life! *Toujours pareille, toujours.* Envy and resentment against Maurice flamed in him. They had done something apart from him. They had struck out a spark. But it could not burn long, and when it sank, what then? He feasted on a vivid picture of their disillusionment. It would break Maurice, surely. Then he hated himself. He could not afford to lose a soul. But he hated Maurice, too, for going apart, worlds away. And Anne? He could not imagine her broken. It was too hard to draw a line about her, to measure her capacities and find their breaking strain. In

the future he saw her as she had been before, always with some power in reserve, a self naturally ungiven, of which she could not be prodigal. What failed him was a vision of them together. Regarding Anne, he saw that nothing would end save by her deliberate choice. Regarding Maurice, he saw him as he would be weakened and thrown down by some inward stress. Dennis envied him even for that, and was malicious against him.

Well, it was no use to remain there. He greeted the prospect of talking to Cradock with satisfaction. How he would commiserate with him! A sudden fancy that the little woman in black was close behind him made him turn sharply about. He could see her nowhere. He was rather frightened of her, but the fact that he could not see her made him wish to discover her. She might have had something else to tell him. Instead of hurrying as he had intended he strolled slowly along to Cradock's club, in the vague hope that even yet she might touch him on the arm.

The big form and the deep voice of Cradock took Dennis into their keeping. It was pleasant to feel that Cradock was really glad to see him, but Dennis had a habit of concealing such things, and he sat with apparent detachment listening to Cradock. An excited wonder whether Cradock was really going to say something that came from his depths was chastened and chilled by the inordinate care which he devoted to the preliminaries of lunch. Impatience nearly made Dennis forget that he was playing the part of ignorance. Remembering, he devoted a sudden energy to discussing a play of which he had read Cradock's criticism.

"You're very optimistic about the theatre lately, aren't you, Cradock?"

"Why, yes. I suppose I am. There's a good deal of good stuff being written. Enough to be optimistic about. Not but what it's my business to be."

"I think there are a good many decent plays, too. But I can't get away from the fact that they are only decent



after all. They're good enough, but they aren't good in the right way. They're all one-sided."

"But they can't all be. Think of the extraordinary variety, from the Irish peasant play to Bernard Shaw."

"And nothing in between. That's exactly my point. One's the unconscious kind. The other the self-conscious. There ought to be something in between. One's all background; the other hasn't any background at all. The result is that neither kind is true. Do you see what I mean?"

In spite of the conviction of his own independence, Cradock was always eager to catch an idea from Dennis. He pressed for further definition.

Dennis did not know whether he was serious or not. He had begun deliberately to say something, but now he had a real interest in the argument.

"Well, take the social comedy or the discursive kind of play. The real condition of its being is that everybody should be acutely self-conscious. That is all very well, but the fact is that people aren't. Genuine self-consciousness is quite rare, and even with people who have cultivated it—some do so naturally—there's any amount of room outside. More than half the time they're unconscious or semi-conscious. The peasant variety simply runs the unconscious to death. Destiny and the powers beyond become quite massive. They monopolise the stage. And that's not true either. People that are worth writing plays about swing from one into the other in a curious kind of way. Whether it's the modern consciousness or not I can't say. But it seems to me that if we're to have a really good play, we must have the two things in a natural sequence, not jerked one on top of the other in the same person, and certainly not just symbolised by Destiny and the raging elements outside and the puny human tragedy within as the old people did. No doubt they had the right idea for their time. You can read and enjoy them now, if you want any proof that they must have been right

enough. But now we need a different kind of thing, a blend of the unconscious and the self-conscious in the same person.

"I rather think this man, Tchekhov, has something of what I mean. He's really very significant,—now I come to think of it. He uses the elements, and outside the window right enough, but only to echo the states of mind of his people. A kind of sounding board for the small voice of the unconscious within them. He gets away from the tyranny of nature with a capital N. We don't feel that kind of tyranny nowadays. Instead we have any amount of tyrannical motions from within. Why, I ended up a lecture on the optic nerve this morning with a rhapsody on the *animula vagula* and the relations of man to the Universe. Quite enough to get me the sack, I imagine. Perhaps when I get back I shall find that they have given it me."

Cradock paused before replying. "That's very interesting." Then he seemed to be thinking his own thoughts, oblivious of Dennis. Dennis felt that he was about to deliver himself, and saw that he had without intention, given him an obvious lead. He knew exactly how Cradock would begin now. Cradock began quite differently.

"Anne's gone off with young Temple."

"Is that true?" said Dennis. He had a tight rein on himself, and knew with relief that Cradock would not expect him to evince any violent surprise.

"Read the letter." With his hand in his breast-pocket Cradock hesitated. A feeling that he ought not show it to anybody restrained him for a moment. He justified himself against it as he handed it to Dennis: "You're the only person who will see it."

Dennis did not want particularly to read it. It was Anne's after all. But he reflected that Anne wouldn't mind. More important was the thought that he did not want to share any secret with Cradock. He had enough to do with his own. Nevertheless, he read :

"DEAR JIM,

"I have gone away with Maurice Temple. You will find that rather difficult to understand, and I should find it hard to explain to you, for the reason that it is quite a simple thing. I know this will hurt you, but not very much, really. I hope you won't magnify it, because that would do no good, and only turn me against you. I don't want to be against you at all.

"And you mustn't think, perhaps you wouldn't in any case, that you have failed me. You haven't. Nor have I failed you. I decided quite easily and quite deliberately about you. Now that I look back upon it I see that I wasn't rash or impulsive or unfair in leaving you. I knew that at the time. But I thought I had better tell you plainly that I am quite certain of myself.

"I cannot help feeling that I would like to tell you why. But, as I said before, it would be difficult, and it would take a long time and many words to make it perfectly plain to you; and there would be the risk that you might misunderstand something that I said and imagine that this was an aberration after all. I should resent that. I would much prefer to have no resentment at all against you. Therefore, though I have put my address plainly on the top of this letter, I would rather that you did not at any time come here to see me unless I were to ask you specially. You must forgive me if I credit you with thoughts that you never have had and never will have. I don't think it's likely. But there is the chance that this affair may affect a Jim that I don't know. I rely on you to do what I ask.

"You had better tell people quite frankly about it, but don't tell more than is really necessary. I'm quite ready to face the music, but I don't see why it should be a brass-band.

"I wish you would do one thing for me,—gather together all my own things and send them to me as quickly as you can. You will know generally what I mean—not



the furniture. Particularly, don't forget the music that is in the drawing-room, and the photograph of my mother and the ivory umbrella which are in the panel-drawer of my desk.

"One thing more. You might be prompted to get Maurice some more work from the office. Please be careful not to do this. It would only hurt. Besides, it's not necessary at all. You know that I have enough to keep both of us in the country.

ANNE."

"P.S.—If you are still uncertain or unsatisfied about me, see Dennis."

The letter seemed so natural and inevitable to Dennis that the postscript did not surprise him. "H'm," he mused, "how like her. . . . I mean it seems to be like her. It's a good letter."

Craddock did not know how to take Dennis's remark. It seemed to leave him, his feelings, out of all account; and instantly he began to manufacture some profound affections. But after all he had some part in the letter. It was a kind of praise to him.

"Yes, it is," he said.

"But what are you going to do?"

Craddock just nodded slowly from side to side. "I don't know. That's really why I wanted to see you." A momentary twinge of pity stirred Dennis, as he watched him. Craddock looked so big and was so helpless, nodding there. Quickly it passed into a revulsion that the man was unable to cope with his most vital concerns. How right Anne had been, how invincibly right! He had never seen clearly through Craddock's appearance of strength before, though he had suspected the weakness that now repelled him.

"Oh, you can't do anything," he said shortly.

Even that did not sting Craddock to activity. "No, I suppose not. . . . I suppose not . . . but . . ."

"But what?"

"She's taken something of me away. I feel—I don't know how to explain—numb. I don't know. She ought not to have done it. I mean she should have done it before. . . . I had no idea."

"One never has."

"No . . . that's right."

Dennis was hating Cradock for his impotence.

"That letter's final. I never read anything so absolutely detached. It's the kind of thing she never would go back on. She would never want to. You feel that, don't you?"

"Yes, in a way, but there's something . . ."

Dennis listened grimly.

"I can't just take it lying down, can I?" said Cradock.

"Why, what else can you do?"

"It's not that I can do anything else. She's shut that out pretty effectually, hasn't she?" He laughed miserably.

Why did he ask these silly questions? Dennis nodded.

"Well what?" he insisted.

"I must do something, anyhow."

"Why *must* you? That's a mere convention—rotten sentimentality."

At last Cradock responded. "Well, I've got to answer her letter for one thing," he said, with a shade of viciousness.

"Oh, is that what you meant. I thought you meant some definite action."

"Perhaps I did. . . . What then . . . ?" He asked sullenly.

"Only that there's nothing to do. You can't get a hold anywhere. It's complete, foursquare. There's no place for a grip. Why anything that you could do would only seem a kind of petulance. What's the good of putting her off you completely? It's something that she respects you. Yes, it is. I should be grateful enough."

"Would you, honestly?"

"Yes, honestly."

"It's not her I'm doubtful about. She's all right. I can't get over her letter, anyway. That's final, yes, it is like her." He did not believe what he was saying, but he was anxious to be thought worthy.

"But why did she go away with *him*?" Dennis had been waiting for it. This time he was not going to put Cradock off by an obvious antagonism. He wanted to know what he would say, to have him more deeply convicted out of his own mouth. He shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know," he said. "Probably we don't know Temple. He's not so very transparent, perhaps."

It was the opportunity for Cradock's superior knowledge. "He's only a boy. I know him. Concerned with all manner of things. All the kinds of problems that worried me at his age,—you too probably. He's just young, young all over. All enthusiasms and depressions. What's Anne going to do when he gets out of it? He's sure to."

"I shouldn't worry about that if I were you," Dennis answered, with a deceptive quietness. "That's Anne's affair."

"And mine. I can't help worrying about it."

"What is there to worry about, anyhow?"

"What's she going to do when it's all over? She's too old to be left by a boy."

God, how he hated Cradock! His rotten mean pride, pricked to a cheap jealousy, and turning into slobbering hypocritical pity, how he despised him for it! He looked up into Cradock's eyes: they glowed with the triumph of a cheap debate.

"I don't think Anne's so very old. Thirty-two isn't old. That wasn't an old letter. Don't you feel that it's ridiculous to concern ourselves with what is going to happen to her? I wish I was as sure of myself. Besides"—he was impelled by his animosity to make a reluctant addition—"if Temple is a boy—he's twenty-four anyhow—it doesn't follow he's a boy as you and I were. I don't



see any reason why he should get through it as you say. To take away from him only means that Anne's made a big mistake. There's not much of that in her letter, is there? I don't feel it at any rate."

"There's something in that." Dennis wondered when Cradock would begin to hate him. He could hardly help feeling the spirit of his remarks. Dennis did not care.

Cradock collapsed into silence. His indignation and his pity were such that they depended upon finding a partner to continue to be. Finding none, they were not; and Cradock who had for a while been voluble and expectant became listless again.

"Well," he broke out after a while, "we haven't reached much of a conclusion, have we?"

It was the same mood that had first excited his hostility, but now, by contrast to his recent outbursts, it moved Dennis to pity, almost to sympathy. The big man so plainly depended upon him, that a kind of flattered pride moved him to speak comfortable words. The impulse had been so suddenly changed and had so little reality in it, that the search for sympathetic speech was very deliberate.

"It's rotten—for you. I'd like to do something to help you, but what is there to do? You can see as well as I can, much better, that the thing is finished, for the present. It's hard on you, if you like. It is certainly. But then things are like that." His words were quite empty. They seemed to have been recorded as he had spoken them, and he examined them with disgust, then hastened to say something true. "It's as though you were two straight lines that had crossed. You can never meet again. No matter what you do, you only go further and further apart. It's wonderful to me now that you kept together so long. You can't escape from the facts. Either your meeting was an unhappy accident, best put away for ever, or this is a madness of Anne's. But you can't help believing the letter."

"No-o. But it seemed all right, you know, Dennis. Didn't you think it was all right, yourself?"

"But I had nothing to go upon. I knew you and I knew Anne, not so much, but I did know her. But I only *saw* you together. I didn't know you together. If I say that it looked all right, it's not saying anything at all, really." Why had he never thought of the Cradocks together? Anne had seemed to step out of it all, not in action nor visibly as she had done now, but to have been herself and alone. He had not anticipated what would happen, save when he came to see her on the afternoon that she went, yet when he had realised that something would happen, it had appeared natural and right. When he had known that she had gone with Maurice, it had made no difference. She in herself was right. The outward circumstances took her colour.

"I thought it was all right myself, at all events," Cradock went on, "and now suddenly the whole thing's gone. It isn't that I care twopence about what people will think, except that they will say and hint things about her. They'd better not. But—I don't know—it was so fine. You see. She was so wonderful. No. I couldn't have understood her. I know I didn't understand her, now. I didn't think about it. I'm not that sort of man, I suppose. But I was so proud of her. You know the way she used to have with people. It's funny, isn't it, but I only began to know what people were worth when she was there. They talked to her differently." Abruptly he stopped. "You're not bored with my talking like this?"

Dennis shook his head.

"I didn't think she would have done it. I never thought of her as being sorry for me then. But now I think she might have been sorry for me. Perhaps it would have been different if she'd had a child. I don't know. Perhaps. . . . I can see those straight lines you talked about. They're so plain. It's so awful to think that they go on getting further and further apart. I shall have to go out

of that house. These last two days I have remembered so much—more than I ever knew.”

The last words hit Dennis hard. This was the Cradock that he had expected. Had he begun thus Dennis would have been firm against him. But now, in contrast to the vindictiveness and the wounded pride of possession to which Cradock had given way, the genuine feeling which showed through the stumbling words met with an instinctive response. The walls of criticism and contempt with which Dennis had fenced himself against Cradock fell, as it were, at the sound of a trumpet. Now it was not pity alone that moved him, but an admiration for the truth of Cradock's misery. From comprehensible everything changed to incomprehensible. Because a woman did right, why should a man be hurt? Some element in himself flooded out to unite with Cradock's wounded spirit.

“There's nothing I can say. But, believe me, Cradock, I would give my soul to say something. Nothing can help you if you're hard hit, I know. That's your own, absolutely your own, and you have to get through with it. What's the good of saying that to you?”

Cradock was fingering a fork that lay on the table, dully watching the movements of his hand. Again the bigness of the man seemed to surge into Dennis's mind. Again, yet more violently, the contrast between his stature and his inward impotence, revolted Dennis. Into his mind irresistibly there came the figure of a great cuttlefish that he had seen dragged out of a rocky pool by fishermen and left huddled and helpless on the shore. Against his repulsion fought the obligation to pity and sympathy. Though the obligation was false he obeyed it. The moment for pity had gone for ever, yet he desired to express it. Words came to him more easily than before.

“Look here, Cradock, do you think that I can do anything? I know it's not doing things that matters at all. It's really useless; but if you had anything for me to do,



it would satisfy me. This is only a kind of selfishness really. I'm talking rubbish. As if there was anything at all to do."

"I'm very grateful." Straightway Dennis despised him for being grateful. Perhaps it was only a phrase. What else could he have said? Of course he wasn't grateful? Why should he be? There wasn't a word of truth in what Dennis had just said. But Cradock hadn't known that. He hated Cradock for not seeing through the pretence! Cradock was really grateful,—that was so despicable. To be grateful for Dennis's meaningless words! Dennis was not annoyed with himself for having said them, but with Cradock for having received them. How could Anne have lived with him for a day? Why hadn't he known it before? The burden of this inferiority was intolerable. Cradock was speaking again, and Dennis listened with a contemptuous indifference which he could hardly conceal.

"There is something—which you might do—perhaps—if you would. I can't go to see her, can I?"

Dennis knew that Cradock desired the shadow of an opening. He would close them all. "No," he said conclusively. "That's impossible."

"Of course. . . . But you may be going to see Temple one of these days. . . . He told me that you're his only intimate friend. Then you'll be seeing them both. I want you to tell me everything about her . . . and him. You will know more than ever I should. . . . That was strange, her mentioning you in her letter. It wasn't because of that, that I wanted to see you. I hadn't anybody else. It's rather ghastly to find suddenly that you haven't any friends; that you've gone on for years without knowing it. You were the only one I could talk to about it. Perhaps Anne knew that. Perhaps she didn't want me to talk to anybody else. I wouldn't have, anyhow. I don't know. Do you know why it was? Yes, you were the only one. That comes rather hard, all of a sudden. . . .

"And the funny thing is I'm not at all sure about you.

That's not quite what I mean. But you might be laughing at me all the while, it wouldn't be very different. I know you're not of course—but you might be. I wonder why that is. You don't laugh at young Temple, I suppose. Perhaps he has the same feeling about you. You can't help it anyway. Of course, it must be all imagination.

"Perhaps I'm the only one you laugh at. I don't mean that you laugh at me, of course. I mean that I'm the only person who feels it like that. Anne wouldn't have. Why did she put your name in the letter? Did you know all about it, before? No, of course, you didn't. Do you know all about it now? You haven't told me very much to-day, have you? Ever since she put your name in the letter, I'm a bit frightened of you. You don't mind me talking like this, do you? No, you wouldn't, somehow. Why don't you tell me all you know? You're not afraid to hurt me, are you? . . .

"Perhaps you don't know anything more than I do, though. But why did she say your name? Did she ever tell you anything? I know she didn't, she wouldn't. It wouldn't be like her. But you must know more than I do. Perhaps if I'd known as much as you do, she would never have gone. I wonder. What a fool I am! I used not to be like this. I must have changed. Perhaps she wouldn't have done it if she had known. What was the good of doing this to me? I'm the wrong kind. Yes, that must be it. I'm the wrong kind. . . . I wonder what that means? Do you know, Dennis? You wouldn't tell me if you did, would you? Why should you anyhow? Anne would though. Why didn't I ask her? Oh, I didn't know it then, of course. Funny, it seems to me now as if I'd known it all the while. Yes, I've always been the wrong kind. But even now I don't know what I mean. I only feel it. Anne will tell me, though. I'll ask her one of these days, soon . . . oh . . . you'll have to ask her for me, Dennis. Don't forget whatever you do. Perhaps it will be all right when I know.

"But that wasn't what I meant to ask you, was it? I've forgotten. Oh, yes, . . . you were going down to see her. I want you to tell her. . . . No, I don't. . . . It doesn't matter now. But don't forget what I said. I didn't know a bit what to tell her, you see. It's much better if you ask her what was wrong with me. It sounds funny, but I can't help it. I can't see what it means, somehow. It just looks ridiculous. No, that wasn't quite it. Just ask her what I mean. Do you see? Tell her what I said just now and ask her what *I* mean. She'll understand.

"What a lot I've been saying. I'm sorry. I don't know why I get like that. But most of it's quite silly. But don't forget the question, will you? . . . Let's have something more to drink. You don't need to go already, surely."

Dennis had risen, but slowly, as though impelled, he sat down again in his chair. He felt he wanted to get away from Cradock in this mood. Not that he was alarmed or frightened. There was in it a suggestion of responsibility for him; and that he desired to avoid. Of course he would take his message, that was a mere nothing, but he dreaded having to support Cradock, to support any man, in this incalculable mood.

"That's better." Cradock had been agitated and impatient, intently watching the action of the waiter as he broke the wire, and drew the cork with a flourish. Then he took a long drink from his bubbling glass. "That's better." As suddenly, his familiar, slow deliberate voice returned to him. "It's rather a strain, you know, screwing myself up tight against that kind of thing. It's as though I suddenly collapsed inwards. Do you understand me? As though I managed to keep shape most of the time, and suddenly the whole thing just fell in. But I'll get over that soon, I suppose. It's a momentary weakness. The strange thing is that I'm rather glad of it. . . .



"You're not angry with me for what I said about you, are you? It wasn't serious."

"Of course I'm not."

"No. . . . I don't think you are. . . ."

They sat silent at the table, occasionally looking at each other. The tables of the dining-room had emptied. Dennis watched one solitary waiter. He had a white nervous face. A deep forehead overhung an insignificant chin. Between them was set a thin wet mouth, continually working. Sometimes the point of his tongue darted out to moisten his lips. He could not keep still. His eyes moved from corner to corner, and he turned about continually. He saw that Dennis was looking at him, and he disappeared swiftly behind a tall hat-stand, from whence his face would peer forth for a moment, then withdraw quickly, as he caught Dennis's eyes. He was an infinite offence to Dennis.

Dennis began to feel the immensity of the room. Empty tables, empty chairs, a dull waste of emptiness spread about them, like a vast grey sea surrounding their island, hemming them in. He longed to be away. Cradock was oppressive with decay. He was, in very truth, fallen in upon himself, a lump where there had been the shape and semblance of a man. Marvelling at the exactness of Cradock's own description, Dennis felt that the sudden awakening of the man to his own condition—an awakening so unexpected in him, only added to his repulsiveness. He seemed to have acquiesced in his own disruption. Just now he had been sincere enough, and Dennis had responded to his sincerity; that was all on the surface. Underneath everything was wrong. There was no mistaking the taste of him. Though at moments he appeared almost to be seeing himself clearly, judging himself to be of the wrong kind, it was only a fetid overflow from some instantaneous corruption. He was wrong all through, repulsive, something to be avoided. If he broke out again like that—Dennis could not contemplate the thought. He wanted

to get away. For an instant he tried to check himself with the idea that it was only a physical repulsion, that he had allowed something hateful in Cradock's appearance, the horrible contrast between his big form and dull eyes and impotent mouth, to prey upon his mind, to give a false colour to the reality. But nothing could overcome his desire to get away. He must have shifted anxiously in his chair.

"You want to be going, don't you?" said Cradock.

"Yes, I must be off now." To avoid Cradock's look he stared fixedly down at his watch. "I shall be late as it is."

"Oh, well. I suppose you must. I've got plenty of things to do myself, too."

As they rose to walk down between the line of tables, Dennis knew that Cradock would take him by the arm. There was no way to avoid it. The thought drove him to desperation. He had a horror of Cradock's touch. He nerved himself, and until they reached the lobby he was conscious of nothing save the tense muscles of his arm, where Cradock's hand touched him.

"Look here, Dennis. I'm going away to-morrow morning early for a month. I haven't decided even where to go yet, but it's decided." He laughed foolishly. "I wish you'd come round to see me to-night. I'd like to have you there. Do come."

Dennis's impulse was to refuse, flatly. A change came over him and his "no" was tempered to "You see, I have a great deal of work to do to-night."

"Couldn't you manage, this once? I shall be clean out of London to-morrow. At least five hundred miles away, let's hope. You might as well come."

For all his overwhelming dislike of the man as he had been revealed that day, Dennis was still curious about him. He was fascinated by the desire to spy him out, and, by spying him out, to triumph completely over him and to hold him under his heel. He had declared finally against him. Before their meeting, while he had been

anticipating it, he had been hostile, but perhaps more malicious than really an enemy ; now he wanted to crush Cradock.

"Perhaps I can manage it. But I may be late, you know. What time do you want me to come ? "

"I suppose it's no use suggesting dinner ? "

Dennis shook his head decisively. Even to gratify his desire, he would not pay that price.

"Couldn't manage it possibly. Say nine to half-past. I think I can do that."

"Very well, then. But don't fail me, will you ? "

"I'll do my best, I promise. You know how things are at the hospital at night, unless I arrange beforehand. I cannot say for certain, absolutely."

It was not Dennis's night-duty ; but he could not leave Cradock comfortable.



## CHAPTER X

As Dennis went his way back along the Embankment by the side of the river, he tried to render himself an account of the last two hours. It was not much use. He could not detach himself sufficiently. The sense of his revulsion from Cradock dominated everything. Every attempt to see them as they had been, narrowed instantly to a picture of Cradock as he had sat there. He could not get beyond it.

Laughter, clear and high-pitched, sounded so close to him that he halted sharp, and looked about him. He was close to a wall. Nobody was near to him, and he was bewildered. Then he heard it again. He looked up. Leaning over the wall were two girls, hardly containing themselves from laughing in his face. He looked at them with a bemused and evident amazement. Dappled sunlight poured from the trees behind them into his eyes, and he blinked. This time they laughed outright, and turned away. He did not want to say anything to them, but it would have been foolish just to walk on. So he raised his hat to them before he moved slowly away. He heard them whisper together.

Then he was grateful for the interlude. Their laughter was in key with the weather, clear as the bright sunlight that now melted away the traces of the morning rain. They had surprised him into realising how deeply he was moved against Cradock. The thought of Cradock had completely occupied him before. It could hardly return with the same strength, but he knew how real was his animosity. Now his feelings seemed to connect with Anne. How, he could not tell, but sought to discover. At first he thought that he was engaged to justify her by proving

Cradock's worthlessness. But Anne was already completely justified, without any support of his. Nevertheless, he could not dismiss the idea from his mind. At all events, whatever might be the inward working of it, he was engaged against Cradock for her in some way. The reflection pleased him, and gave him a confident conviction of rightness. Also, to put so much of himself into a pursuit was a rare and comfortable experience for him. Yes, he was very grateful to those two girls for so awakening him to his own enviable condition. He turned round, and was surprised that he had gone, without noticing it, so far away from them. He could still see something white above the pavement in the distance, which he was content to believe was the white blouse of the older girl, who had been the first to turn away. After a pause, he resumed his journey.

During the afternoon he wrote to Maurice, saying that he would like to come down, "and see you both," at the end of the following week. He bestirred himself and looked out a convenient train. He would be at the station at ten minutes to twelve, and would walk, so that he would be in "good time for a heavy lunch."

But the thought of his evening with Cradock accompanied him continually. He wanted to know why Cradock was so anxious that he should come. It couldn't be that he was going to burst into another maundering confession. Even he, even in his present state, would hardly dare to. Perhaps he had to have somebody about with him now. The possibility that he had been invited to share an orgy of sentimental despondence made him shiver. He had to pay for his curiosity; but at the same moment the sense that he was doing it for Anne lent a glamour to the evening, and in that comforting conviction he remained through an infinity of small occupations at the hospital during the late afternoon, through the exacting dinner-table conversation of men who had heard, or heard by report, his peroration to the morning lecture, through a period of dreamily

doing nothing, smoking in his own room, deliberately prolonged, until the moment when he arrived at the familiar door in Kensington.

He was relieved that Cradock did not open to him in person as he had half expected. The usual preliminaries were unusually valuable to him that evening. When he entered the study Cradock hardly looked up. He lay stretched in a big arm-chair in front of the fire, one hand hanging down over the chair-arm, and a glass of whisky on a little table near to his hand. Apparently he had been staring at the fire.

"Hullo, Dennis. I'm glad you've come. It's pretty late, but you're within your limits."

Dennis was wondering whether the attitude was intentional. The commonplace of it was terrible. A thousand bad pictures and ten thousand bad novels proclaimed it their own. But he granted that Cradock was not the man to do such a thing of set intention. It was natural to him. He was the kind of man of whom the bad pictures and the bad books were true. This was the climax for which Dennis had unconsciously been waiting. He had been repelled but he had also been mystified by the Cradock of the afternoon. Now all the hints and obscurities were plain, the vague lines had taken their final shape in this picture of Cradock. He had resolved into his own essence, and become the very idea of himself. Dennis rejoiced. He had the full measure of Cradock, and encompassed him on every side.

And then he was perfectly sure of himself. He could have played his part securely to eternity.

"Have something to drink?" said Cradock. "You'll want it. I'm rotten company."

Dennis helped himself to whisky and soda quickly to anticipate his host. Cradock's hand would certainly tremble, and he did not want to see it. Cradock was not drunk. He never would be. But he had been drinking. Dennis pulled another chair up to the fire and sat facing



the window. He saw little more of Cradock than his profile.

They had forgotten to draw the curtains. Then he saw that there were no curtains. Outside the half-moon, firm outlined and near in the sky, poured a silver light on to the little garden, giving to the stone steps and the two stone bowls that flanked them, the semblance of ghostly flesh. The ivy-covered wall at the end set a shining boundary to the deep, shaped shadows beneath it. Dennis tried to explore them with his eyes.

Cradock shifted himself up in his chair, bending forwards to the fire, stretching his hands to warm. He looked at Dennis, and then turned his head sharply to the window.

"Feels cold out there," said he. "I wish they hadn't taken all the curtains away from the back. I ought to have told them to leave these. The house is just a shell. If they raised the blinds in the front, everyone could see the skeleton. It's a rotten feeling, the last time you're in a house that you've lived in a long time."

"Like standing on a sand castle while it melts away. I know. I've changed rooms often enough."

"Only it's a bit worse here."

"Yes . . . perhaps the sand-castle was wrong. It's not important enough. More like a lonely island crumbling into the ocean with you for the one inhabitant. You don't know where you're going to find a landing any more.

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down,  
It may be we shall reach the happy isles  
And see . . .

What would you like to see, Cradock ? "

"What do you ask me for ? You know."

"I'm sure I don't."

"I know you do " . . . Cradock slowly insisted.

"Oh, I thought you had managed to put that out of your mind. You'll have to. You'll make a mess of it if you don't."

"How the devil can I put her out of my mind? Could you?"

"I don't know, I'm different. I never put things out of my mind. But then you live, I don't. I just drag about a lumber of memories. I don't pretend to solve any problems. You do . . . solve them, I mean—not pretend."

"Well, I'm going away by the nine-twenty to-morrow morning. That's shirking, isn't it?"

"My dear man, it's a solution in itself. I should never go anywhere, never have the sense to, if I were in your case. I should just hang about till Doomsday."

"Would you . . . really . . . ?"

"And if nobody brought me food regularly, I should die of starvation."

Craddock said nothing.

"You see," Dennis explained, "I'm not one of those who get over things. The only reason why I haven't completely succumbed is that things don't happen to me. But as it is my powers of resistance are gradually decaying, and the moment something really does happen, it'll be all up."

Craddock suddenly awoke to the situation. "Damn it all, Dennis, it's serious. By God, man, it is."

"Do you mean that I don't think it's serious?"

"Well." He hesitated. "No—o. . . Of course not. . . What a fool I am! . . . You mustn't mind if I'm a bit jumpy."

"It must have been my fault. I must have a way of making people think that I'm laughing at them. It's not the first time it's happened."

Dennis watched the shadows through the window and Craddock warmed his hands in silence. "Do you want to know why I asked you to come to-night?" he said in uneasy confession.

"If you like—not otherwise. . . ."

"Well. . . I thought that you would like to be in the

house on the last evening. I don't know why. Would you ? ”

“ Yes, of course, very much.”

“ You see it was ours for a long time. It seemed a long time, anyhow. But it's an age since that dinner-party, much longer than the time before. I wonder why the dinner-party seems to have been the last thing . . . it must have been, of course. That must have been the beginning. She had never seen him before.”

“ I don't know anything about that. But I can understand why it seems a terribly long time to you. It does even to me.”

“ You haven't seen Anne, since, have you ? ”

“ Yes, I did. I came in the next afternoon to get that book you lent me. No, not the next afternoon, the day after.”

“ Why, that was the afternoon she went away.”

“ Yes, I suppose it was.”

“ I wonder . . . did you notice anything strange in her ? ”

“ Nothing at all. . . . Except perhaps . . . ”

Craddock was eager ; therefore Dennis hesitated.

“ Well . . . it's hard to describe . . . there was something about her . . . rather as though . . . I don't know how to describe it, but she was a little more Anne than I had ever known her before.”

“ Oh,” said Craddock. He was disappointed. “ I know what you mean . . . at least I think I do . . . I'm not quite sure, though.”

“ Well, I haven't got any other words. It's easy to read all sorts of things into it, now that I know what's happened. But they wouldn't be true.”

“ No, of course not. . . . But couldn't you give me some idea ? Do you mean she was extreme, somehow, rather at the edge of things ? I'm worse than you are. . . . But you know what I'm after.”

“ Yes, I think I do. It wasn't that at all. Now I know



what has happened, I should say that she seemed to me extraordinarily sane, quite calm as and if she had decided about something." The answer gave Dennis a real satisfaction. "But that's reading it with a knowledge of the future. You can't really do that."

"No." Cradock rose to his feet, and stood looking out of the window with his hands in his pockets. When he spoke again it seemed as though he had been taking a decision apart. "Come upstairs. I'm packing." He led the way to the door. "Bring your drink. I'll bring mine." Glass in hand, Dennis followed him to an unfamiliar height. Open trunks, half-filled, obstructed the landing. Three doors were open. Through each he could see a litter of white paper on the floor. He caught a glimpse through one of a deep yellow wall-paper over which a tenuous pattern straggled with careful labour. Yellowed rather than yellow, he thought, as he stepped behind Cradock over a heap of boots into his bedroom, and he knew that the room was Anne's.

"I hate packing," said Cradock, setting his glass down upon the chest of drawers. "Somehow, I couldn't let the maids do it, though. I'd sooner do it all myself, now. You see, there's Anne's."

Dennis evaded giving an answer to this. He felt that he had been trapped up there in the top of the house. Everything seemed to be precarious, set on a razor's edge. Dennis felt an uneasy quiet within him. He was bodily apprehensive. Sitting down on Cradock's bed he emptied his glass quickly, and placed it on the chest of drawers, relieved to be rid of it. Cradock, bent over a trunk beneath him, looked up and said: "I can't do any more just now at this one. I've lost all my initiative. I can't even cope with a trunkful of my own things. They bewilder me."

"That's not so very strange, is it? I'm always like that. It's always touch and go at the station, because the cab has to wait while I do an hour's packing in ten minutes. I tried the dodge of always getting the cab to come ten

minutes too early, but it wasn't any good. I can never manage to deceive myself. But I'm just like you are about packing. The only thing is to do something else for a bit . . . you might even tackle another box."

The last words had been spoken through Dennis rather than by him. More than ever he desired to be away. He would have given anything to be downstairs again, and yet he had suggested that Cradock should begin on another box, knowing that he would have to remain. He knew that he would have to go into that yellow room, yet he was afraid to do it. He might kill Cradock there. A vision of murder passed calmly before his eyes. It was so natural and trivial that it almost amused him.

"What's the joke, Dennis?"

"I just saw myself in the act of killing you. It's an awfully simple thing, you know. I never realised it before. It's done before you remember that we don't live in that real world, but in an unreal one. . . ."

"God, man, but that's a funny idea."

"Isn't it? But it's funnier still when you think that at the moment I spoke I didn't think it was funny at all. It was as natural as . . . as the movement of my lips now when I'm speaking to you."

"Do you often feel like that?"

"Like murder? Good heavens, no! Don't you see that the murder's only incidental? It might just as well be telling the truth to someone or other. As a matter of fact, that's more common with me. I see myself turning into a spirit, almost not existing any more, then I tell the truth, the real truth. . . . It's the only part of my time I really care about. . . . As though I spent a bit of my life in a real world and the rest in an unreal one. . . . And that's probably why people imagine that I'm laughing at them."

"Don't you ever want to do the things you think about?"

"How the devil could I want to? Can't you see that the moment I begin doing things I'm back again in the

unreal world? There's no connection between. There can't be any."

"Well," laughed Cradock, "I don't see how a spirit can murder a spirit anyway."

"No, you wouldn't."

Cradock was startled by the note. Dennis went on quietly. "You see, I'm rather touchy about these things. Anyhow, it's not for you to apologise because you can't help thinking that I'm laughing at you—it's for me. You don't mind, do you?"

To the appeal Cradock instantly responded. It freed some impulse in him that Dennis's coldness had repressed.

"Of course I don't. . . . But you know that. Let's go into the other room. . . . That's what I really wanted you to come for this evening. . . . I've got to pack Anne's things . . . you remember the letter. I don't know why, but I felt that I must have you there while I do it. I'd have told you before, only something put me off. Come on."

Cradock took his glass into his hand and went before Dennis into the yellow room. A moment later he turned back, brushing past Dennis, and set his glass on the floor outside. Then he turned up the light. Two large wooden boxes stood neatly in the middle of the room with the flaps of a paper lining hanging down by their sides. Everything in the room was tidy, scrupulously ordered; but beneath the veneer of order was an emptiness. Dennis knew that all the intimate possessions had departed, and he half suspected that Anne had deliberately given an unfamiliar arrangement to her room before she left. One thing besides struck him strangely. There was a bracket for two electric lights by the side of her bed. One was missing. Above all else this made him feel that he was in a deserted place.

"Nothing's been touched since . . .," said Cradock, surveying the room.

"No? Didn't Anne take anything with her?"



"Nothing. . . . I don't think so, at least. Here are all the things." He waved his hand generally round the room.

Dennis sat on a chair by a small writing-table and watched Cradock slowly take a photograph of himself from the dressing table and close the frame. He was contemptuous, and more contemptuous when he heard Cradock,

"No, I couldn't have done it by myself. I had to have you with me."

"Shall I just sit here while you stow away the things, or would you rather I helped?"

"No . . ." said Cradock hastily. "I'd rather do it myself."

"Very well. But you'll have to go a bit faster. I have to be in before midnight. You mustn't think I'm callous, but there's the fact."

The table stood beside a window. Dennis leaned over and pulled aside the curtain. "That's a wonderful moon to-night. It seems very high up here. I suppose it isn't really very far." He paused and listened to the crumpling of the paper in which Cradock wrapped the things.

"I feel as though I can't go on," said Cradock. "It's like the end of everything. . . I must though. . ." By the time Dennis had left the window for his chair one half of the dressing table had been cleared. Some tortoiseshell boxes and brushes remained. "They're very sumptuous, aren't they?" he said.

"Pretty good," said Cradock. "I gave them to her for a birthday present last year."

"Ah. . . ." Dennis gave up his insistent endeavour to replace Anne in the room. He was baulked at every turn. She might have busied herself in carefully removing every vestige of her presence, folding her tiniest tendrils back again. The things that remained, the tall broad wardrobe with panels of yellowed glass, the table at which he sat, bearing on the full curve of its pedestals little birds and fruits impertinently inlaid, the smooth wood frame of the bed with insets of pliant cane, dully shining with faded

gilt, at head and foot—they were gracious, but they were not her. Not even the whisper of a rustling skirt or the fragrance of a lingering scent had defied her.

Finding no trace of her, he was glad, for the sight of Cradock bruising something of hers with his false and clumsy regrets would have exasperated him. He was also disappointed and impatient. Cradock's attempts to convey his broken heart into the gestures with which he packed Anne's most outward possessions were like the spasmodical motions of a marionette. He was sick and tired of the performance. It was so unconvincing that he nearly forgot that it was the manifestation of a living man. Nor did that recollection reconcile him to his waiting part.

"There isn't much more, is there?"

Cradock got up and looked round the room and at Dennis.

"I can't see anything else, can you?"

Dennis shook his head. "Are all the drawers cleared?"

"Yes . . . except that desk you're sitting at. . . . I haven't been through that . . . just see if there's anything in it, will you?"

"Very well." He turned round in his chair, and began to open the drawers. They were unlocked. Three were empty. "I think they're all cleared," he said. As he opened the fourth he saw a small packet wrapped in tissue paper and tied with a piece of ribbon. His instant impulse was to say nothing, to slip the packet into his own pocket. But he spoke to Cradock instead. "Here's something." Cradock reached out his hand. Again Dennis felt that he would dispute it with him. He gave it to Cradock. "Anne must have forgotten it," he said lamely, following the packet with his eyes.

Cradock felt it with his fingers. "I wonder what it is," said he.

"How can I tell?" Dennis stared at the carpet beneath his feet. He pressed his shoe hard on a cluster of grey grapes that pointed towards the corner, but no juice

spurted out. He was in suspense until he heard the dry rustle of outspread tissue-paper.

"My God, that's funny. Look here, man." He held up in his hand a tiny umbrella of ivory about a finger long. At the top of the handle was a bead of glass or a diamond, for it sparkled in the light. "What on earth could she want with that? The other thing must be a photo of her mother. I've never seen it before." He held it out to Dennis, who took it. While he heard Cradock mutter: "I wonder what the deuce. . . ." He saw a woman dressed in the ample costume of the 'sixties. Out of the general greyness of the daguerrotype emerged the clear outline of her face. Her dark hair was drawn straight across the profile of her head, and she was leaning forward from her chair as though to contemplate the beauty of her own hands, which rested on a table before her. The line of her mouth was thin and firm, but half-hidden as she turned, so that he could not say whether it was pity or contempt that moved her lips. Written in ink on the glass so that they could hardly be seen were the words, "Mamie, about twenty-seven." Then he felt the presence of Anne once more. She seemed to have risen out of the picture.

"I've got it now," said Cradock. "It's something you look through. Views of some place or other—a dozen—oh, it's Paris—yes, it's printed at the bottom." Dennis watched his big body against the light. He could just see the wrinkles at the side of his eyes as he screwed them up to look through the pin-point of glass.

"Well, that's a rum thing to keep all these years. It must have been given her when she was a little girl," said he, still looking through the glass. "Concorde—Tuileries—Vendôme—here, you have a look."

"No, it would strain my eyes." Dennis handed him back the photograph. "Besides, I must be going."

"Why, it's not eleven yet. Look." He held his watch so that Dennis could see.

"Can't be helped. I have to go."



"But why? You said you needn't be in till midnight."

"Yes, but I want to go now. . . . You don't want to keep me?"

"Of course I don't, my dear fellow. . . ."

"I stayed to the end," Dennis persisted.

"I'm awfully grateful. I should never. . . ."

"Well, then, that's why I want to go. Don't you see that it would be an anticlimax? Just look at it as you do at a first night. *Ça saute aux yeux*."

"I see what you mean," Cradock said, feeling his way. "Yes, you're right."

"I'm sure I am. Good night. Don't bother, I'll let myself out."

"Well, good night then."

Dennis walked down the stairs. Every flight seemed like a stage in an ascent of delirium. Cradock was leaning over the banisters listening to each eight descending steps followed by the pause of the landing. The sixth pause was the hall, and the passage to the street.

"Good-bye," he called. "I'm going to-morrow. We shan't see each other for a long while."

"No." The clean noise of the shutting door cut through his echoing "Good-bye."

## CHAPTER XI

ANNE stood before the window of the large upper-room with her arm upon Maurice's shoulder, humming the horn-motive from "The Flying Dutchman." Big, restless grey clouds whirled across the sky. A low undertone of wind, rising and falling in the wood, rose in the silences.

"Morry, I think this is where I shall have the piano."

Half interested, he looked at the space by the window to which she pointed.

"It's a good place. You'll be able to see the wood from the small window;—the whole world from here. . . . Or do people who play the piano not like to look outside?"

"Of course they do. The phrase I was humming came straight out of the clouds there. . . . But you're sure it won't disturb you in the cell next door?"

"I don't think anything disturbs me. It wasn't pianos in those rooms in Vauxhall, but carts on cobbles all day long, and they didn't worry me. But you're always asking me that. Don't you believe me?"

"You know I do. I only wanted to be quite certain. But I'm getting terribly impatient about the piano. I've never had so much music in me as I have now. . . . I wish I had written last night. . . ."

"It wouldn't have made any difference. They couldn't have sent it this week. They'd have got the letter this morning, Saturday. Even if they had what you wanted they wouldn't send till Monday. Besides, it's easy to make it quite all right. I thought of walking into Pirford this morning to meet Dennis. If I start in half an hour and go by the fields, I'll have over twenty minutes to do things before his train gets in."

"But isn't it a very long way to walk?"

"Not more than five miles by the fields. The road runs right round the foot of Tenpenny Hill, to keep on the level. If you cut straight across it you save an enormous lot. It's a grand morning to go. I don't think it'll rain. There's too much wind. Look how those clouds are spinning. I wonder how they manage to keep together. Besides, Dennis said he was going to walk, and it'll be fun to walk back with him. . . . I can see about that box of yours at the station too."

"I'd like to come with you. But ten miles—no, I couldn't manage that. But I'll make something special for lunch. . . . Perhaps I could come to meet you. . . . But if you're going by field paths I'd better not. What time do you think you'll be back?"

"About a quarter to two. If you do think of meeting us, it's quite straightforward for the first mile. Do you remember where the path from the hill turns into the little white road—the way we came back the other afternoon—our first walk? . . . Well, the path begins just opposite that broken gate. You won't come further than that? It may be bad going after the rain too. You don't know what real chalk mud is like." He laughed. "But what shall I do about the piano? Don't you have to choose?"

"I don't suppose there'll be an awful lot to choose from. But I've written out a list of the pianos I want—in order. They're sure to have one of them, I imagine. You have only to see that it's quite new, and arrange about hiring it and sending it over. . . . Do you hate to do things like that?"

"No, why should I? Anyhow, you get that list, and I'll just put on my thick boots. I'll see if there are any other things to get, too. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

Anne sat down in a chair and watched the driven clouds gather into a dark blue mass on the horizon. Her eyes followed the nearest and biggest to its distant home. Then



she began to walk slowly about the room. While she walked, her phrase expanded to a swelling volume of sound. "How I do love that," she said to herself at length, tapping on the window-pane. "There are mornings made for music. I don't often find a Wagner morning; but this is one. . . ."

Maurice called up to her, but she could not hear the words. She tiptoed quickly to the door, for she desired at that moment to tread delicately, and flung it open.

"Ye-es," she called.

"You're enjoying yourself up there. . . . I wanted to ask if there was anything else to get you. I'm just off."

"No, nothing. . . . You're going to see about the box. But there's no hurry about that. It is a wonderful morning . . . au revoir."

She opened the window as he went down the garden path. The ungallant winds made sport with some rebellious hair. She caught it up with one hand, wryly smiling, and waved to him with the other, as he turned at the gate. "Blowy," he called, pulling his hat down on to his ears. Then he walked quickly along the road, with long, almost exaggerated steps, rolling from side to side. At the corner before he disappeared behind "The Badger," he waved again.

Anne shut the window and went to her bedroom, busy with her reluctant hair. "As for your hair," she said to the mirror, "you might be a girl of eighteen after a tennis party." Her eyes fixed on her reflection, while her fingers searched the dressing-table for a box of pins. The lid was hard to open with one hand, and she glanced down perforce. It was a black box of Maurice's, labelled vain-gloriously "Studs." She smiled. "It's his only *article de toilette*—the only piece of evidence against me." Still holding a wisp of hair she turned to look at the bed, as yet unmade that day. He had forgotten to take his pyjamas away. Generally he kept them rolled tightly, for they were very woolly and made a clumsy bundle at

their smallest, in a drawer of his chest in the cell. Now they lay importantly upon the bed. It was curious. He had dressed in his own room as usual, that morning. Then she remembered that he had come back soon after getting out of bed to remind her that Dennis was coming. He must have been rolling them at the moment, and left them behind.

Her fingers returned to her hair. Vexed, she suddenly let it fall down and began a thorough reconstruction. Her cheeks were warm. She remembered Maurice's visit of the morning vividly. There had been a touch of added confidence in his timid knock, which she had awaited with foreknowledge. Last night they had for the first time been lovers. He had been strange with the burden of a half-ashamed desire. Of the tinge of shame she had been more acutely conscious, and she had begun herself to feel ashamed. Nevertheless, knowing he had surrendered himself, she had striven to give herself up to him. Even now the trace of a shudder passed through her as she recollected the agony with which she had, so vainly, prayed for unconsciousness. In that moment a keen instinct had shown her how she was utterly involved in the falsity she had foretold to herself, and to him. She did not care to think about it, and she covered the thought deliberately with the remembrance of how he had rested his head upon her breast and gone to sleep, while she had watched her own poignant unhappiness fade away. Almost she had heard herself fall asleep.

Her hair finished, she looked at the clock that lay to her hand. Twenty-five minutes to eleven. She had more than three hours of the morning to herself. Then underneath the clock she caught sight of the list of pianos she had written out. Her impulse was to run after him. But he would be more than a mile away. The only chance was that he might remember and come back for it. But that would certainly make him late for Dennis. Oh, he wouldn't do that in any case. It wasn't to be expected. It was her

fault for not having given him the list. It wasn't for her, who had herself forgotten, to expect that Maurice would remember. Probably the piano wouldn't arrive any sooner, even if Maurice were to call at the shop this morning; but she was so anxious that the least thing definitely done seemed to bring it nearer to her. Still, he couldn't come back. It was her own fault. For all that she could not put away a hopeful suspicion that he might return. Then she would not let him go to Pirford. It would be useless anyhow.

Anne busied herself with the tulips, talking to them, tenderly stroking those she cut, pale yellow and deep red, white and yellow-brown. Bending over them she seemed to bend beneath a wave of sudden knowledge. How changed were all the outward circumstances of her life! She thrilled as she used to thrill in the train, approaching unknown cities. As though the rush of consciousness were but the stormy swelling of her material blood, it ebbed away from her brain and left her unchanged,—unchangeable, she thought, the same dimly mysterious Anne that she had always been even to herself. She was reassured and disappointed. She knelt down before the bright yellow flowers. The storm of strangeness overwhelmed her again and she pressed her face into the blooms, crushing the fleshy flower-cups. For an instant, she depended upon the outward things of her life. Their change quickened and frightened her, but only for an instant. She passed back into herself, more aloof, more dispassionate and cold. She felt that she was very old. She seemed to have fulfilled her form, like a crystal, now set hard from among the fluid in which her elements had been dispersed, impervious to new influences and unlearnt knowledge. There was no more communication for her with the beyond, no more communion, hardly a window in the ark from whence she might send forth a dove.

Something in the definite little picture pleased her, and



she brooded over it, sad for her loneliness and glad that she was alone. She moved about the garden in the grey light of the windy day heavy with knowledge, tending the flowers and the little hedges with an infinite care, gently, as knowing that they too were ordered with purpose and set alone, like stars.

Meanwhile Maurice went quickly forward over the fields. Although he looked seldom to the right or to the left he was happy in the steady harmonious march of his body, and in the stout dancing wind, that threatened instantly to undermine his close-jammed hat. At first, while he walked swiftly, he was timid of a new freedom. The shapeless clouds of his mind were only shaken, not driven away. He put out tendrils of his being, with nervous care, which slowly wound about the joy of health and active happiness. Gradually, more and more of himself seemed to work out of depression and insecurity into carelessness, out of a past where he was uncertain of himself into a future where he simply lived. The thin blade of inevitable distrust which divided him between uncertainty and a whole happiness was imperceptibly withdrawn. As he came down the last slope of Tenpenny Hill, his jolting, long-striding descent quickened by its own momentum into an easy, light-springing run. He kicked his heels into the turf smartly or he would have plunged into the gate that opened on to a hill road thick with silver-grey mud. Along this he pounded noisily. Even the sound of his sticking shoes was comfortable; the elements conspired with his mood. He stuffed his hands into his coat pockets, and threw back his head, and laughed. A few paces ahead a bird flitted over and under the hedge, off the road and on to the field, with pauses so swift that he never could hold it steady before his eyes, though he pressed on in the exciting chase. His road lay through a wood before he began the last stretch of fields. The wind shook the boughs, and the boughs, green tipped and glistening, let fall their bursting raindrops upon him. Their hollow thudding

upon his hat was friendly, and when he took off his hat to shake it dry and a fine spray of tinier drops smothered his face, he only laughed again.

On a field bridge not far from the town he waited to watch the big fish biting. The eddying circles of a few raindrops beginning a belated shower mingled with the incessant commotions of the rising fish. The unending pattern changed and changed before his eyes, always trembling on the verge of the nothingness of calm, but always withheld on the brink and renewed with ripples out of the depths, quick darting and slow dying. Maurice leant for long over the bridge-rail bemused and fascinated before he was conscious of a deep desire to drink out of the stream. He passed over the bridge and on to the grass. In one place the bank made a small flat promontory, not more than a dozen inches above the water. There he lay down at full length, scrabbling backwards with his toes in the wet grass and the soft earth, gripping some roots that grew in the bank, nearly covered by the stream, with his hands. He bent his face down to the surface: the water covered his nose and mouth, as he took a long gulp of it. Muddy-white, and chalk-clouded to the eye, to the mouth it was fresh with an aftertaste of pleasant earth washed and scoured by the rain. He dabbled his hands about, and absorbed himself in the pleasure of feeling the drops run off his nose and lips before he rose. He looked down at his coat. It was patterned with wet. A bigger drop, like a tear, splashed down upon it while he looked. In bewilderment he put up his hand and touched the rim of his hat. It was soaking. Then he remembered he had forgotten to take it off before he drank, and he was surprised and vaguely happy with himself for being so natural a fool. At the same moment he woke to the fact that he had been by the bridge for a long time. He turned his hat back to front, and set off at a trot across the mile of final fields.

The signal by the station bridge was down, and in the level distance he saw the white steam of the engine sweeping away on the wind. He ran faster, scattering the sheep before him, eager to race the train. Though the chase was futile he believed and enjoyed it: but the last few hundred yards he ran anxiously lest he should miss his man. On the opposite platform he caught sight of him and whistled. Dennis waved to him, picked up his bag, and walked towards the bridge. Before he had reached it Maurice had rushed up the stairs, clattered loudly across the bridge and descended the steps with a leap.

"Hullo, you've come."

"Did you think I wasn't going to?"

"No-o. Of course not. . . ."

Somehow Dennis checked Maurice's exuberance. He was deliberate. He always was, and Maurice expected it. Nevertheless it chilled him now and he became apprehensive. He was too fond of Dennis to withdraw into himself. He could never be wholly on the defensive with him. But he had been prevented from intimacy, which might have made all the rough places smooth, and he knew that they were waiting each for the other to say something about the affair with Anne.

"We're going across the fields?" said Dennis, who knew the way.

"Yes. . . . But wait a minute. . . . I've got to see about a box . . . belongs to Anne."

Dennis followed his abrupt dive down the approach into the goods office, and encountered him hesitating under the tall empty shed. He was peering about for the clerk.

"Hullo, I thought you'd stay in the station. I didn't mean to drag you down here. I wouldn't have bolted either. . . ." He looked about him again, stepping forward to see if anyone lurked behind the pile of boxes and bales. "Rather like the *bagages enregistrés*, isn't it?"



At St. Lazare ? ” He shot the remark over his shoulder at Dennis, and began to pound on the low counter with his hand, ineffectually.

“ What on earth shall I do ? ” he asked, bewildered.

“ Isn’t there a bell or something ? ”

They both looked about. Maurice was in no condition to remark things of service. He was still some way behind all actual happenings when, rather surprised, he saw Dennis put his finger to an electric button in the wall.

“ Oh, that’s it,” he said.

A resentful, pale-faced clerk appeared, dusting crumbs from his waistcoat, and trying to swallow a mouthful prematurely. Seeing Maurice he changed his mind and chewed on. Seeing Dennis in the background, he changed his mind again and swallowed with a gulping effort. He went very red in the face.

“ Oh, I’ve come about a box that’s been sent by goods.” The man was impassive. Impassivity echoed in his “ What name ? ”

Maurice was suddenly confused. He looked on the ground.

Dennis’s voice intervened timely. “ Temple’s the name. Mrs. Temple. T-e-m-p-l-e. Warren Cottage, Seldenhurst. . . . ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Have you got it ? ” Dennis took charge of the negotiation.

“ I think there’s a box with that name. I’ll see, sir.”

“ Here it is anyhow.” Dennis climbed on to the counter and tapped one with his foot. “ What’s to be done with it, Morry ? ”

Maurice lifted his head and revealed the colour of his face. “ I don’t know.” His voice was low and shy. “ Let me think. . . . Moon will be in on Monday.”

“ You know Mr. Moon of ‘ The Badger,’ don’t you ? . . . well, he’s going to call for it on Monday. Is there anything to pay ? ”

The clerk disappeared for a moment.

"That was right, wasn't it, Morry?"

"Quite," he said, and hurried into silence.

"What a depressing hole this is! It simply reeks of desolation and emptiness. . . . It's as bad as London,—worse, because here it's indecent. In town it's natural."

"No, sir, nothing to pay." The clerk held out a yellowish paper. "You have to sign for it, please."

Dennis handed it on to Maurice. "Here, this is your business. Sign down here." He spread out the paper on the rough counter, and watched Maurice make a hieroglyph with the clerk's pencil stump. "There's nothing more, is there?"

Maurice shook his head, and led the way into the sun, and over the first stile.

"Can't I carry that bag of yours for a bit, Dennis? You must be sick of it, I'm fresh."

"No fagging. It's about as heavy as a pair of gloves."

"Well, you'll tell me when you're tired of it anyway. I must take a turn at it. It's only fair."

"Very well. . . . But it's all right at present. . . . By God, it's worth while to get away from that damnable London."

"Yes, it's good out here to-day. It's been blowing hard, and trying to rain. I stopped so long at the pool that I nearly missed you."

"And I didn't expect you." Maurice was not attending to Dennis's words, screwing himself up to the point of confession. The silence loomed between them.

"I was a fool . . . in that office. . . . You see, I'd never thought about the name, and it took me by surprise. I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't been there to help me out. It was awfully good of you."

Dennis was almost embarrassed. "I understood what was up, so I chimed in."

"Just at the critical moment," Maurice persisted. ". . . But . . . how did you know what name it was? I couldn't have guessed. Anyhow, if I'd had to, I should have said the other thing. . . . It was rather decent of Cradock, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose it was."

"But how did you guess it?"

"I didn't. I knew."

"Oh, . . ." said Maurice, silenced, not daring to ask.

"I saw it being sent off, you see. Cradock asked me round one night, and he was packing it up whilst I was there. . . . He said he was going abroad for a month, starting the next morning. That's why I went. Of course I saw the label. I couldn't help seeing it, considering I sat by the box for about an hour."

"So that's how you knew which one it was, too. I only just remembered that it was strange that you did know."

They were walking over the footbridge. "That's where I wasted all the time, coming to meet you. Rummy thing—water, how it can keep you looking at it. See that little spit sticking out. I had to lie down and have a drink. D'you ever get taken like that?"

Dennis shook his head. "I'm too old, or something. I should be thinking that my rump was sticking up into the air, if the muddiness didn't put me off altogether. I'm not one of the natural ones . . . and I don't think you are, very. But you've got a touch."

"How did Cradock take it?" Maurice burst out. "You knew it had happened before you saw him, didn't you? Or was it before my letter?"

"The same night, I think."

"It's hard lines on him, I suppose. But I can't help that, can I?"

"Not possibly. I shouldn't worry about him, if I were you!"

"I don't, really," Maurice repudiated. The momentary



flash of conversation died away. At times he thought that Dennis was purposely keeping silence about himself and Anne, to provoke him into an outburst. What else was there to talk about? How could he avoid it except by intention? But it was impossible to maintain an irritation against Dennis. He never was really angry with him. Glancing at his face, he saw that he was staring moodily at the ground beneath him. The friendly glance fell in desert places. Of course it was very awkward for Dennis to speak about it. And it was for Maurice himself to begin. He had done it, and he had to explain. Not that he wanted to explain,—he wasn't going to, and he couldn't—he wanted to hear what Dennis thought. For a while he heard nothing but the soft crushing of their steps on the grass. His desire to ask the question compelled the blood to his head. He worked himself into an extravagant state. Then he did ask: "What do you think . . .?" but the words crept out of his mouth so husky and small that Dennis did not hear them. Maurice was vexed with shame and confusion; and immediately in a clear, too decided voice, said:

"What do you think about this business—honestly?"

A false calm came upon him while he waited, as though his outer surface had suddenly frozen.

"It seems all right," said Dennis slowly. "... But it's a bit difficult. There are two sides to it—you and Anne. Well, I know you, a bit anyhow, but I'm not sure that I know anything about her."

"I don't either." Maurice wanted to be contradicted.

"You must. After all you've done something. . . . Well, I should have said that you might have any number of things done to you, but you'd hardly do anything. You've begun to get beyond my knowledge of you, if you want me to tell the truth." Dennis wondered whether he was speaking the truth. He recognised a shade of falsehood in his words, but they came naturally. "As for Anne—she might do anything. It wouldn't surprise me. I

mean—only interest me. That was why I wasn't surprised when I got your letter. I wasn't. But that doesn't explain anything. That only means Anne's done something. You see what I mean. It's as though she were positive and you were negative. That was how I used to see you, as a matter of fact.

"But it's not good enough now. It seems that you've gone and hit something between you, and that's what baffles me. . . . I don't see the common point between you. I dare say that's why I've come down—to spy out the land."

Maurice did not reply. Dennis had revealed something to him. He had been taken outside himself and given a glimpse. The unfamiliarity of the aspect troubled him. What was the common point of impact between himself and Anne? You could not be expected to see things like that when you were so close and entangled. Of course there was one. Why, there they were! But perhaps that was all wrong about the common point. Perhaps lovers were just complementary to each other, supplying each the other's deficiencies. Anne's deficiencies—that was rather queer. You could hardly say that she had any deficiencies. In fact, you didn't look at her that way. But then where did he come in? A warm memory of his happiness with her last night enfolded him, so close and actual that it decided his thought, and overflowed into words.

"I don't know—any more than you do—I can't explain. I was a bit frightened of her at first. Yes, I was. But now it's gone. I don't think at all. I know that sounds just like anybody else. I'm trying hard to tell you, but it's no good. . . . It's as though I had just toppled over the extreme edge of self-consciousness, into—unconsciousness—anything."

"Yes. . . . Is Anne the same?"

"Of course. . . . At least, I suppose so. She must be. You see you can't put us apart like that. You're tackling

it in the wrong way. It isn't me, and then Anne ; there's something new, a kind of me-and-Anne, and that's so hard to tell you about."

"That's what I meant by what I said before," said Dennis, "I can't really tell you what I think about it, because it's new. I have to come at it from the past. The you I knew and the Anne I knew,—they don't help at all in understanding both of you,—rejuvenated."

The hint of sarcasm stung Maurice. He caught at a soft green twig in the hedge and tore it away, and began slowly to pluck the buds.

"Well, do you think I'm changed, now ? " he said.

Dennis glanced at his face. He was apparently intent upon the stripping of the twig. A nervous flush contrasted with an unsteady sternness in his lips. For an instant Dennis racked himself to be honest ; then a sudden indifference came on him. Except that Maurice was easier to hurt, he felt no change. He had acquired a private possession. Neither the acquiring nor the acquisition were to be criticised, not even bantered. That was a new phase and a weak one. It was only an attempt to conceal that he was not sure of himself. He had never tried to conceal his insecurity before, and it was Maurice's natural honesty about himself, expanding with Dennis's sympathy and understanding, that had held them such close friends. Now Dennis felt indifferent, even complacent that Maurice was betraying himself.

"No," he said judicially, "it's strange, but you don't seem to have altered, except perhaps in one way. But then I've not had time to size you up. It all comes to the same thing again."

Maurice felt as though he had been found out. There was not anything to find out, he thought ; but the feeling remained. He had expected, rather hoped, that Dennis would find him changed ; for thus he would have been able to believe in himself. Perhaps he never believed in anything so much as Dennis's belief in him. And Dennis



believed in him a little less now than before. It was a bitter disappointment. He found a perverse satisfaction in leading Dennis to enlarge upon his lack of change.

"But that's not true. I don't believe you need any more time to size me up. I've been a bit awkward with you, waiting to ask you what you thought,—but then I'm always like that. It's all me, I'm sure. You don't think I've changed; and now you won't think it. But I ought to have changed, oughtn't I?"

"I can't see there's any 'ought' about it."

"That's not the point," Maurice said impatiently. "The fact is I haven't changed. That's right enough for me. I just haven't. It only means that it wouldn't have been me if I had. But you would expect that I'd have changed, wouldn't you? I know there's no 'ought' about it in one way. But you don't have to consider me alone. That's all over. You must think of me in relation to Anne—oh, Lord! it's silly of me to tell you that—as if you didn't know." He broke off. The twig, twisted, snapped half across. Pulling at the edge of the soft bark, he looked quickly at Dennis. "You did expect me to have changed, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't."

If he could have been angry with Dennis he was angry then. His friend had suddenly turned enemy, seeking out his weak places. He wanted to strike out in defence.

"Do you think I'm incapable of changing?"

"No, it's not that."

"Why didn't you expect me changed then?"

"It depended upon the kind of change . . . I thought you would need to become active;—fuller, completed on the incomplete side of you. Do you understand? I didn't see the beginning of that in you, or anything out of which it might have developed. That's why I didn't expect to find you different. But can't you understand that I'm working from fixed ideas? It's perfectly ridiculous for me to talk about it. I don't know. I'm only laying down

the law about the Ethiopian not changing his skin. How the devil do I know whether you're an Ethiopian, or whether there's any reason why you should change your skin even if you were one ? ”

“ Do you really mean that honestly ? ” persisted Maurice.

“ Honestly. I do really feel now that I'm just floundering in a mental chaos. As for what I've been saying before, I'm not sure that it wasn't a kind of jealousy.”

Maurice laughed, but the laugh ended dubiously. There was a streak of seriousness in Dennis's remark, that raised him again in his own esteem. He was half convinced by it that he had progressed. Immediately he was strong enough to be silent.

After a while he said : “ Anne said she might come to meet us at the road. I wonder if she'll be there.”

“ The weather's cleared at all events,” said Dennis.

It had in truth. A chink of almost colourless blue sky had opened to a vault while they walked. Before it the heavy clouds had been driven into a distant belt on the horizon. While she took shelter within the house from the sudden shower Anne had watched it slowly broadening, debating in herself whether she should go out to the meeting-place. She had almost forgotten that Dennis was to be there, and when she remembered it, an instinctive repugnance to go out to them overcame her, as if to go out to them were to expose herself. She preferred to await criticism, for so she could maintain herself impervious to it. Dennis was bound to be critical, she knew. That was of no account. She also knew that he would be critical for her rather than of her. She shrank from affording him occasions for that. Therefore she gathered herself inwardly, until the act of going out to greet them was impossible.

“ I don't see her,” said Maurice, balancing himself on the top rail of a stile to look across the field that led to the road. “ I suppose she had something to do.” Disappointment sank instantly to apprehension of disaster. “ Let's hurry up,—we must be late.”

"We've come along at a fair rate," suggested Dennis.

Maurice made no reply, but led the way furiously across the field. "I think I'll run on," he said, half-way across, "you don't mind?" He ran fast across the field. Dennis saw him scramble tumultuously over the far stile. His head jerked occasionally into sight over the hedge.



## CHAPTER XII

"WHY, what have you been doing?" said Anne.

"Nothing," he gasped, out of breath. "I only came on—ahead, to see if you were all right."

"What made you think there was anything wrong?"

"You weren't at the road, you see. I had an idea—quite silly—so I just had to run."

"Oh, I wish I had come!" Anne took his hand into hers. "There wasn't any reason why I shouldn't; but, just when I was getting ready I didn't want to."

"Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. I just felt like that. You don't mind now, do you?"

"No, of course not. Besides, it wasn't as if I'd really expected you. It was only when I got to the road. The moment I saw you weren't there, I was worried. That's all. But you look tired. Have you been doing too much?" He stood between the window and the fire. Anne held out his hands, and looked steadily up at him from her chair.

He turned round to the window. "Here's Dennis," he said, and pulled his hands away. He slipped into the kitchen. Anne rose to open the door.

"He deserted you on the way then?" she called to Dennis as he came up the path.

"Bolted like a hare, almost before I knew he was gone."

They shook hands as they were used. Each looked for a difference in the other and found none.

"I envy you, Mrs. Cradock," he began, and stopped short, ludicrously. "So I've begun already," he said, with unfeigned surprise at himself. "What am I to call you

now ? It's a serious problem—or it will be unless we settle it now."

"Let's settle it then. I think the safest way out is for you to call me Anne. You won't have to hesitate."

Dennis was happy enough at that. "I'm not at all sure, though. It may be a bit worse ; but I'll do my best. . . . I was going to say that I envy you. I've forgotten what I envied you for, probably for being in the country. Oh, yes ! And I was going to give you a pathetic account of the mental torment I have to undergo in the hospital. Your interruption saved you that."

"I didn't interrupt you as a matter of fact—it was you."

"Well, then *I* saved you."

"I'm grateful. . . ."

"Morry found you uninjured, apparently."

"Yes. I wonder where he is. He went out just as you came to the door."

"It's all right. I'm only washing myself," Maurice's voice emerged from the kitchen. "I'm just coming."

Dennis and Anne watched each other for a little. He was disinclined to make another remark. Unless he attempted to be flippant, he could say nothing. The last attempt echoed so hollow in his ears that he remained silent. Anne was aware of his discomfort, and he knew it. He was angry with himself for being cheap. The situation tried him, for no way of handling it presented itself to him. If he had needed to say nothing it would have been better, for he felt that he could have managed to keep silence. One thing made it impossible. Anne was silent too, and her silence had a quality. It was personal and her own. His own was empty and uneasy beside hers. While this sped through his mind he heard the outer door rattle. Maurice had gone outside. He had to say something now. An impulse rose in him to tell Anne exactly what he was thinking. That would have been an appeal to her mercy and sympathy. He thrust it away from him. A kind of

pride urged him to meet her on her own ground, equal with equal.

"I saw Cradock the other night." He threw the words like a glove of challenge, almost superciliously.

Anne lightly clasped her fingers together, and bent her head forward until her lips touched them. "I thought you would. I wrote him a letter advising him to see you if he felt inclined."

"He showed me the letter." Was it to hurt Anne, to damage Cradock—or only honesty? Something of each of these, but chiefly honesty, and in it all was the desire to say something of moment that might provoke a response. He seemed to be shrinking in stature beside her.

"Ah!" It was acquiescent. "I think that was sensible of him. He asked you to explain it, I suppose? . . . That must have been difficult."

"It would have been, if I'd really tried to; but I didn't. I don't think he was in the mood to understand."

"Strange if he had been. . . . But I'm rather sorry that you saw him like that. He can be very unfair to himself." She spoke as though she had known all that had passed. Not an evidence of curiosity escaped into her words. He thought first that hers was a marvellous composure, an impregnable defence erected against him, then that she did know—all that there was to know about Cradock, that she neither needed nor desired to learn anything of what had passed, for she already knew more than he. How could he persevere in talking of it? He was on the point of confessing his thoughts. Now that he was near her his control of his own consciousness was so precarious that he desired instantly to be rid of it. He waited, fretting at the bridle, vainly about for some speech that would not betray him by its inconsequence or its inadequacy.

In spite of himself he said quickly, "I hated him—loathed him. I believe I could have killed him." He saved himself sufficiently to let the words sound dispassionate.

Anne leaned back in her chair, her hands still lightly



clasped before her. She seemed for a second to stiffen and stretch like one awakening from a brooding sleep, and her lips held the semblance of a smile, unreflected in her eyes, which shone with the grave comprehending kindness which was their repose.

"Yes," she said, "I think you would."

"Why do you think that?" he pressed. "It was a discovery to me."

"I don't know that I can express it in words. For one thing I haven't the habit. Besides, it's something that doesn't really need words. Jim has it in him underneath. If the blow is hard enough to penetrate, it seems to cut right through him, to separate the inner from the outer man. . . . There's something terrible about the inner Jim. It's so small. Sometimes I've thought it would shrink right away. . . . I've longed for it to strike back. Instead, it was the outside which responded. . . . It might have done ugly things. When it came out, I could have—beaten the sky in despair. I think you must have felt like that . . . a little."

She spoke as it were a voice out of a darkness, telling of intimate things without intimacy. Dennis wondered if she had suffered so much that the recollection of her suffering were a lifeless memory. The sudden thought that perhaps an element of her soul had withered and turned to stone stung him to the quick. He was impotent to do anything. A mad and heady anger against the incongruity of the room they sat in, the afternoon light, the silly fire flaming yellow as though poised in air, a curiously tense expectancy of Maurice's entrance that would snap the incredible bond that united Anne to him, preyed upon him and filled him with a torment to laugh, inwardly, at himself, at human things, and futile destinies.

"Yes, that's how I felt—but only a little, only a fraction of what you know."

"Why should you know it? That's my privilege—my part of the bargain. . . . I'm sorry you saw what you did."

What's the good ? But you'll have the sense not to pity me at any rate. Then I don't mind very much. . . . Perhaps I'm glad after all. . . . To be understood, ever so little—I don't mean that this is so very little—is a strange sensation. I couldn't tell you whether I'm glad or sorry." There was the same remoteness in her voice. Her words seemed to deny themselves as they were spoken. Then they seemed to be apart from her and from him, to be a third voice descending upon them both. "It will shatter like glass," he thought. He knew it would have to be. He tried to put the apprehension from his mind by repeating to himself her words which came slowly and regularly back to him by no effort of his own. Instinctively he sought to bathe himself in them again, with them to stop his senses and to press down his insurgent consciousness.

She shattered it deliberately. "How very like a woman you must be !" she said.

He accepted the decision. But the new note, the new and normal sense of her words bewildered him by sudden contrast.

"Why ? How do you mean ?" he almost stammered.

"I believe you live on confidences. That's like a woman. Men, most men, avoid them. Or would you say that I didn't know men ?"

"I live by making false ones about myself, if that's feminine."

"They're all false if it comes to that. We lose our sense of proportion : that's why we make them. There's nothing bad in that ; but it spoils the confession. The only really true ones are those we make about other people. The trouble is that we don't often have the opportunity. People aren't important enough. Perhaps it's as well. It would be a strain to live in the heights. . . . Besides, there'd be no adventure in speaking the truth if we always expected to do it. Most of the time we forget that there is a truth. We have to ; because we can't get it just when we want it. But all the same, it's there—potentially as you'd say—

and sometimes we have to act by it. I wonder if your experience is the same ? ”

“ I don’t know—yet. Go on.”

“ Yes. . . . But what to say ? I may be very different from others . . . no, I don’t think that I am, really. But I find that the truth about myself is unconscious. I don’t know it, but I feel it. . . . Please don’t think I believe in female intuitions. It’s my fault if you do. I am not used to expressing myself. I mean that the truth of myself is a particular kind of seeing, in an unfamiliar light. It’s then I see the truth about other people and other things, because I am the truth of myself. It’s as though we were meant to see things clearly, and at moments we managed it—completed our own design. . . .” Anne spoke carefully, enunciating each word as though she were tired. She turned round towards the table and drummed listlessly, noiselessly upon the corner of the cloth. Her head drooped sideways against the cushion of her chair, and Dennis saw that she was pale. “ I can never make up my mind,” she went on, “ whether it’s good or bad to be made as I am. It seems to make one either indifferent or reckless concerning ordinary affairs—tolerating everything or tolerating nothing. Perhaps they’re both wrong. At any rate, most people would say it was wrong to refuse to venture a farthing to save a nation and risk your life for a sparrow.”

Maurice entered and stood irresolute between them. Anne smiled at him reassuringly. “ You’ve been a long while. What have you been doing ? ”

“ Oh, it was only a little job, but it was hard to do. When I was running here, a nail came through my boot. I’ve been banging it down.”

“ Well, what do you say about it ? Is it wrong not to venture a farthing to save a nation, yet to risk your life for a sparrow ? That was where we’d arrived. We were waiting for an answer.”

Maurice played for safety. The atmosphere was bewildering. “ It all depends.” He hastened to cover up



the foolishness, but he resented that the occasion for it should have been offered him. "I don't mean that. . . . But how"—his voice was irritated—"can I know what to answer, without knowing all that went before? There's all kinds of contexts possible for it—a debating society—the New Testament. Christ would have done both. Plato might have done neither, and they'd have been right, both of them. Who were you talking about, first of all?"

"I agree. It was a mean advantage. . . . But let's have lunch. I'll explain later."

"You've not been waiting for me, have you?"

"Yes and no. If you had come we should have begun. As you didn't we didn't want to. Speaking for myself."

Maurice glanced at Dennis in the chair. "Oh, he'd have shouted to me if he'd been really hungry." Dennis laughed, and made for the kitchen. "Do you mean to say you've been sitting there all this while without having washed your hands? Well, I'm damned. You're responsible, Anne. You've been listening to his confessions. What on earth has he been saying this time?"

"Nothing in particular. He began by calling me Mrs. Cradock, and I've had to apologise for him to himself ever since."

Maurice had clean forgotten the awkwardness which he had stayed in the garden to avoid. It was so natural to be with Dennis, to banter him and be bantered, that he had moved easily. He was now very much at home, full of health and spontaneity.

They sat down together.

"How long are you going to stay here?" asked Dennis. Maurice looked at Anne, expecting her to answer.

"All through the summer, I expect," she said. "That is unless Morry has any other plans."

"You know I haven't," he said with emphasis.

"I had a letter from Richmond this morning," Dennis explained. "He asked about you, and said you could have the cottage for ever as far as he was concerned, and that I

was to tell you. He's gone off walking in some unknown place called the T-a-t-r-a—that's how he spells it. He says he's going to stay in a hut through the winter and try to think a bit. I don't suppose anything will come of it. He might perhaps write the books he's always threatening us with. . . . But you don't know him, do you ? " he turned to Anne.

" Save that Morry's quoted a few sentences of his at me—not at all."

" He's a queer fellow, with a black, triangular kind of face. He's very kindly ; but he can neither get near you, nor you near to him. You never attempt it."

" He hasn't really very much of himself about his house."

" No, he wouldn't. . . . He always constructs his surroundings, never lets them grow. I believe his affections are all intellectual. What do you think, Morry ? "

" I'm not quite sure about him."

" Now I think of it, he was always rather different with you. I suppose I'm just seeing him through my own spectacles as usual."

" He's always been very decent to me," said Maurice.

" People always are ' very decent ' to him. I wonder why that is ? " said Anne.

" There's nothing else to do," Dennis explained. " In the end it's always an appeal *ad misericordiam*, made to the right people. It works quite simply. The really right ones succumb immediately. The wrong ones scare him miles away—like a blown feather. He gets too much entangled with the half and halves to get away so promptly, so he quivers like the rabbit in front of a snake, long enough for the snake to repent and be decent. Isn't that it ? " Dennis laughed. " Of course it's a flagrant swindle, but it's natural to him. You can't complain."

" That may be," said Maurice, " but he's not the one to say it. For every person I know, he knows a dozen, they are all decent to him, and, what's more, they think he's a wonderful fellow to get on with. Why he's never quar-

relled with anybody. No one gets a hold. Instead everyone's jealous of everyone else because they see more than their fair share of him. This is really a great privilege that he does us in coming to see us. . . . The worst of it is that we really are grateful, and we can't help showing it."

"Anne doesn't seem to agree, anyhow."

"Do I seem ungrateful?" she asked.

"No, I wouldn't say that—unconcerned rather."

"I'll bet she isn't. But, Anne, he really does expect you to confess that you appreciate the honour."

"I must wait for an opportunity. It'd be too obvious, now."

"He'd have had a real grievance, if I hadn't been to meet him at the station," pursued Maurice.

"At all events you forgot all about it. You were within a minute of missing me altogether. If I hadn't half expected you, I shouldn't——"

"There you are, you did expect me after all. What did I say, Anne?"

"I said half-expect. That only means that you might possibly come. Anyhow, it was worth while risking a minute or two—not more. Besides, I wasn't quite sure of the best way by the fields. They would have been impossible; so I waited."

"Was he so very late then?" asked Anne. "He started early enough."

"So I did," broke in Maurice. "And I've just remembered why. I forgot all about the list, the piano, everything—except the box at the station. I remembered that. Moon's going to bring it on Monday. I'm awfully sorry about the list. But if you write by to-night's post it will be there first thing on Monday morning. Or you could ride in with Moon and see for yourself. I never thought of that. . . . You knew I'd forgotten it?"

"Yes. About half an hour after you'd gone I found it in the bedroom. I'd never even given it you. It was my fault."



"I don't see that. I ought to have asked for it. . . . Well, it can't be helped. It was a good job I did stay by the pool after all. If I'd got to the station early, I should have remembered about it for sure. It would have worried me to death."

"What's it all about?" Dennis asked the question of both.

"Oh, Anne's keen on having a piano here. She made out a list for me to take to Thornton's. So that we can hire any one of them they've got. I went off without the list. That's all. . . . Are you very disappointed, Anne?"

"How could I be when I forgot to give you the list? I'm not quite so unreasonable. Anyhow, it's quite easy for me to go in with Moon on Monday. That's better than any list or letter. So long as I get it as soon as possible I'm perfectly happy. As it is, I'm rather lost without one. I've grown accustomed to it. I don't think Morry is quite prepared to grant me the right to have one," she laughed.

"Why do you say that?"

"It just occurred to me. No," she said to anticipate a question, "you've never said anything of the sort, or anything calculated to make me suspect it. It's sheer calumny. But it came into my head."

"I was a fool to forget."

"But don't accuse yourself any more. We've settled the question. . . . Did Dennis tell you he had seen Jim?"

Maurice was resentful. There had been enough truth in Anne's remark to put him on his defence and suggest a sense of injustice. "Yes," he answered, "he told me."

Dennis was relieved that he said no more. He was anxious that Anne should not make the revelation concerning Cradock to another. The confession, if it was one, was at any rate his own, and he guarded it.

"I wonder if he told me more than he did you. He couldn't very well. He told me nothing."

"And me, nothing. I must say I didn't ask him very

much. I didn't know how to begin. And when I did, I didn't want to know. So that all I got out of him was that he was there while Cradock was packing your box—the one at the station."

Anne glanced at Dennis.

"You didn't tell me that."

"You didn't give me the chance, after all."

"No, I suppose I didn't." Anne kept silence, thinking.

Lunch wavered to an undecided end in the silence. Clouds came up thickly, bearing with them a half-darkness and broke into a heavy rain. The wind whipped the windows with it. Maurice's shoulders shrugged. "Murderous weather," he said as he beat the fire and scattered the floor with splintering coal. "A get-you-outside-and-cut-your-throat kind of weather."

"Don't vent your spleen on the coal. It's wasteful as well as dangerous." Anne gathered together a few pieces that lay within range of her toe.

"Didn't you hate it too?" He pointed with a poker at the window. "It's not light, and you can't call it dark. What's more, it won't be really decently dark for a couple of hours. It's a good thing we managed to make lunch drag up to tea-time."

"It's a pity we can't go for a walk," ventured Dennis, now smoking in front of the fire. "But I believe Anne rather likes it."

"As a matter of fact I do. A room never seems to me quite a room until it's a shelter, and you can feel it. It's so safe when the rain bangs on the windows and I'm inside. But you both despise that point of view."

"But you see it's not really dark," objected Maurice. "That makes all the difference. This is only a kind of Arctic twilight."

"Anyhow, I'm going to leave you to it," said Anne, rising and moving to the stairs.

"Why, where are you going?"

"Upstairs to my room."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. . . . You're very inquisitive. Meditate—anything."

"Only—won't it be cold?"

"No. I can keep myself warm. Besides, I've got a fire there. . . . And now may I go, please?"

"Anne, don't. . . ."

"No, I won't. You two can have an uninterrupted discourse."

"I hope you're not doing it for me. I've got nothing to say. Besides, he's in a desperate mood, evidently," said Dennis.

"Oh, no. I'm only consulting myself. Good-bye for an hour. Do you think you'll want any tea, either of you? Or shall we leave it out?"

"Just as you like," answered Maurice.

"Very well then—no tea. Tell Alice."

Anne disappeared.

Maurice was rather puzzled by her. He pulled his chair up to the fire, half-facing Dennis. He too lit a pipe and was silent, save that he remarked again upon the particular horror of the weather.

In spite of themselves they listened to the sound of Anne's tread in the rooms above them. They were both curious, and both desired not to listen. But the strain of a deliberately started conversation was unfamiliar to each in the other's presence, and neither cared to undergo it. So they sat for some minutes on either side the fire without speaking, almost without moving, save that Maurice from time to time screwed round to take a quick glance at the rain-blinded window panes.

Above them Anne began to sing, low enough to be singing to herself. She could hear that they were not talking, and she crooned. But the house was so still, beneath the regular beat of the rain between the gusts, that they could hear her when her voice rose above a low humming. Neither knew what she was singing.



"Does Anne often sing like that?" said Dennis, almost whispering.

"How do you mean, 'like that'?" Maurice hardly understood the question. Then something familiar in the sound came vaguely into his memory. "I don't know. Yes, she does sometimes. But not often. . . . At least, I don't think so. . . . I don't know."

## CHAPTER XIII

AGAIN silence descended upon them. It was terribly irksome to Maurice. Between him and Dennis silence was unnatural. They had been silent together, often enough. But this was different. It was oppressive. Maurice wanted to speak, to be friendly and intimate as they used to be, but a weight was on his tongue. For a moment he had the idea that Dennis expected him to be silent while Anne sang in the room above them, and he felt that he had been reproved for a real offence. Instantly, therefore, he determined to speak ; and then the knowledge that he had nothing to say to Dennis came upon him. He never did have anything to say unless he was free enough to be intimate. A suggestion of restraint froze the very fountain-head of speech. Casting about to find whence the restraint had come he became nervous and impatient, for he could not tell whether Dennis or himself was at fault. Nor was he in the mood to consider now, if he had ever been in the mood to consider anything between himself and his friend. He felt that it must be due to some third thing come between them, and he was so anxious to reassure himself that it was not really there, that he managed, though with a constraint perceptible in his voice and his uneasy motion in his chair, to say :

“ I say, Dennis, this isn't going to make any difference to *us*, is it ? ”

“ Why, of course not. I say you haven't changed. I don't think I have. Where could the difference be then ? ”

Now Maurice was happy at the thought that he had not changed. Presented to him under a different light, it comforted him. “ I'm glad I haven't. You see, you're the

only man—I mean it'd make an awful difference to me if we didn't get on together any more. . . . I felt uncomfortable with you just now. There seemed to be something between us—in the air or somewhere. It was so strange, it worried me."

"But we're strange to each other, just now. At least you are to me. It takes me a long while to convince myself of what I really know—I mean that the change as far as concerns me and you is only outward. I think that's all that's the matter with us."

"Yes, that's it—it must be." The solution was grateful to him. "I seem just the same to myself. Of course there's Anne now." He tried hard to reckon in an instant how much Anne had changed him. During the last two days he had, normally, been hardly conscious of her. The state contrasted with his timidities and apprehensions before. He felt the real comfort of it enough to be honest, he did not know enough about it to be sure of what he meant. "But Anne's somehow natural to me now. Do you know what I mean? There's Anne and there's my hand"—he stretched it out towards Dennis—"it's all the same kind of thing."

Dennis nodded. "That's very wonderful." He spoke sincerely, because Maurice had almost convinced him. "I think I can understand. Not out of my own experience, of course, but I've often thought about that state between two people—a man and a woman. I wondered whether it really did exist. I could always see that it ought to. What is curious is that I never thought of it for people like me—or you. You're really very like me. I could never see myself responding enough. . . .

"I do sometimes think about getting married. It would help to anchor me, and I'd like to have children. But I never get much farther than thinking about it. You see, a big woman would overwhelm me. I believe she'd kill me, because I'd know that I couldn't give back to her. She'd tire of me of course; but I should be the first to go, half



because I'd know that she would tire, half because I shouldn't have the power to respond. The only chance for me is the woman who would be quiet and have children and look after them. I've a good capacity for affection, quite genuine affection. I have for you. It might increase so that I shouldn't despise her and be tired of her. But it's a risk, and then it's not love. She might even be natural to me most of the time. But there would always be moments when I'd compare it with the real thing, and I don't know what would happen then. . . .

"I sometimes think I might manage to put that part of me—the part that lives by an ideal—into something else. But I don't think I could do it consciously, and if I did, I'd probably make a terrible hash of it. I dare say there's a way out; but I see things too clearly. That paralyses me. My trouble's simple enough, really; the true part of me is an idealist, but that's always suppressed. I suppress it myself. That's why I'm so deathly critical.

"You're an idealist, too—not so much as me, perhaps, because you're not so conscious. But, for all that, you may have a better chance of hitting a star. You say you've hit one now. I'll believe you. You have to, anyway. Yes, Anne's a big woman. . . ." Maurice did not interrupt him, but waited. "Yes. . . . I feel sure about that," he went on. "And you say she's natural to you, now. . . . That may come too easily. . . . But you must have changed. . . . I know I'm going back on what I said just now. I'm only feeling my way. I don't mean that there's anything to change our friendship. I don't feel that. . . . I wish I knew what part of you was in love with Anne."

"I don't know. All of me, I suppose."

"No, that's not it. I don't see how it could be, anyway. You wouldn't want me, if that were true."

"No . . . you're right. . . ."

"But we're coming back to the old thing again. I'm not sure whether it's not a terrible waste of energy to talk about things like this. You know about yourself better

than I do. But I imagine that it's harder for you to be quite honest, now. . . . I'm not sure that it's not harder for me to be honest, too."

"You don't mean that you haven't been honest just now?"

"About myself, yes. . . . About you, I'm not so certain. Are you certain you've been telling the truth about yourself?"

"Yes. . . . I think so."

"Ah, then probably I've been honest too."

"That's very mysterious. What do you mean?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. . . . I'm quite serious. . . . There always comes a time when I'm talking like this when the whole thing seems to blow away like smoke. Smoke's hardly good enough—for it's always just at the moment I'm beginning to see things very clear. I was just going to catch hold of something and show it you. 'There's your naked soul,' and the whole thing went." Dennis laughed.

"I didn't tell you about the lecture at the hospital the other day. That was on the day your letter came. Things seem to be happening riotously just now. . . . What a devil of a lot *has* happened!" He spoke to himself. "Oh. . . . I was giving them something on the nervous system—the optic nerve. That's the fifth year running I've said the same things. I shall have to chuck it. Perhaps I was deadly sick of it then. I don't know. Suddenly I went off into a rigmarole about the unity of mind and matter. I tried to tell them what a ghastly plant all this medical psychology really is. Just then it was all as simple as the rule of three to me. I began to career off into the unity of man with the universe. It was perfectly plain. Curious how I could see the whole system working together—no, not working, playing like music. The moment I was there, beatific, something snapped and it all collapsed together into nothing. I remembered where I was. I wanted to run for my life, to get away from the hideous people. Then came the strangest thing of all. I thought,

‘My God, that’s done it,’ and I didn’t care a damn. The only thing that worried me was how not to let myself down with a run, not in front of them anyhow. But they really didn’t matter.

“What I didn’t want to do was to betray what I’d been saying. Do you understand? I wanted to hold myself steady on the right side of the line between them and us—me and the truth. I remember exactly what I said. ‘I don’t think that it is worth while to talk about a form of metaphysical depression in a lecture upon the optic nerve. In fact I cannot see that it will be of any use at all to you—except perhaps those of you who are interested in mental pathology.’ It doesn’t sound much; but it meant a hell of a lot to me then. I just managed to save myself with it, and get myself on the side of the elect. It was touch and go; and, after all, at the critical moment, the thing did go smash.”

Maurice said nothing. He had listened to Dennis’s story with his ears alone, still wondering what Dennis had meant. All that about love and affection had been aimed at himself, he thought; but then Dennis was so absurdly self-conscious, that he could hardly ever believe in people feeling anything unless they could tell him all about it. There were some things that one could not describe after all. He was still engaged in satisfying himself that Dennis had the wrong point of view when Dennis asked:

“What are you going to do down here?”

“The same as usual—read. I’ve still got a little work—reviewing. Cradock’s come to an end, of course. . . . Oh, there’ll be plenty to do as soon as I can get my books and be settled. I’ve got a sort of idea for a play. I’d like to earn some more money; but I’ve got a little and Anne has plenty, so that we don’t have to worry.”

“What’s Anne going to do?”

“Why I suppose she’ll do the same as usual too.” It occurred to him that he did not know what she would do; as far as his knowledge of her went, “the same as usual”



was merely a phrase. "Oh, of course," he recollected, "there's the piano. That'll be here early next week. But up till now we've been so busy that there's been no time to do anything."

"No, I can imagine that."

"I wonder what Anne does do all day?" said Maurice, as though questioning himself. It made him curious what she might be doing now. He heard steps that might have been in answer to his thought descending the stairs.

"Here she comes. Why not ask her?" said Dennis.

Maurice was angry with him for suggesting it. His annoyance was aggravated by the problem "why not?" It would have been so simple and straightforward to ask her, and he wanted to know very much. But for him then it was quite impossible. Standing at the stair-foot, the wavering light from the fire glancing upon her face, Anne became actual again to him.

"You've not been talking very much," she said. "I can hear perfectly well whether you're saying anything; though, unfortunately, I can't hear what you're saying. I've been up there nearly two hours. You can't have been talking more than ten minutes."

"Well, there wasn't anything particular to talk about," said Maurice.

"Isn't that rather queer for you two?"

Dennis was eager to dissociate himself from the inclusion, he hardly knew why. "It's not so very unusual," he said, "in fact it's rather the normal condition—unless I'm violently denouncing the hospital. He's as tired as I am of that now, so there was nothing left for me to talk about. It's quite simple."

Anne seemed not to hear him. "Won't you have some light now?" she asked, while she reached down a brass lamp from a shelf by the door. They watched her light it. The full flood of bright light poured upon her for a second. Then the green shade obscured her again, save that her hands still rested on the edge of the shade and shone like a

small point of radiance in the surrounding darkness. She might have been materialised out of the dark. With her hands on the table she bent forward towards the lamp as one bends to shelter a flickering flame. Maurice admired her. To him she hazily appeared very beautiful. He wondered at her as he would wonder at the bright moonlight and shadow she loved to point out to him. The impulse to criticise and appraise her was foremost in Dennis. Anne was more actual, more a woman to him, and he did his utmost to hold that nearness steady in his mind. It was a potential equality. But he found that it would slip from him. Therefore he spoke.

"We—Morry was wondering what you do . . . ?"

"What I do?" she repeated, looking in the half-light first at Dennis, almost peering after the hidden expression of his face, then towards Maurice. He was plainly confused by Dennis's words; and he shook his head in dissent.

"No, not really," he said. "Dennis asked me what I was going to do, and I told him; and then he wanted to know what you were going to do. I said the same as usual, but I wasn't at all sure what that meant. That's all. . . . Dennis has a rotten way of suddenly picking a question out of the past. He makes it sound so different."

"Yes. I know," she said. "And in any case, how could you say, when I hardly know myself?" A quiet and steady challenge was in the words. Maurice was warmed by the vindication. With Anne on his side he was proof against an insidious malice that seemed at times to emerge in Dennis, and so quickly disappeared that he could never be certain that it had really been. He was emboldened to ask:

"But what do you really do, Anne? Tell us." He would have said "tell *me*": but before Dennis he could not.

"There's nothing to tell. Do you think I'm mysterious? I really do nothing—that is I sit and dream—think—if you prefer it, for hours on end—when I have the chance."

"But what about?"

"About you and him—and Alice and Jim." A shade of petulance was in her gesture at the silly rhyme that interrupted like a provoking child. Then she smiled at herself. "But mostly, about myself."

"I wish I knew some of the things you thought about yourself," said Maurice. "Don't you, Dennis?" he concluded lamely.

Again Anne wondered at him. He managed to appeal to her and to hurt her at once. "But it doesn't really matter." The thought that Dennis was watching and listening moved her. "I think I'll try to tell you one of these days, Morry. Perhaps it would be worth while for you to know."

"I wish you would."

Dennis recoiled into himself. He had not only antagonised Anne, but he despised himself for the way in which he had done it, by insinuating criticism against Maurice. He did not care that he had betrayed Maurice. Uppermost in his mind when he thought of that was the conviction that Maurice needed it, needed to be made insecure, otherwise he would go on deceiving himself. Again he despised himself for glozing his motives. He wanted to stop Anne from wasting herself on Maurice. It might well go on for ever as far as Maurice was concerned. . . . Ridiculous—as if he could prevent Anne from doing what she deliberately chose to do. For a second he wondered whether it was deliberate, really. He would like to know how it had happened. Anyhow, Maurice could not have done it by himself. Anne must have chosen, at least met him half-way. What was the good of trying to stop her? What conceivable right had he to pronounce on her? It was absurd.

The real fact was that he didn't understand her any more now than he had understood before. All that he had succeeded in doing was to send her to Maurice's side, to parry on his behalf all the blows he aimed. What was he after



in trying to hold them apart? There was Maurice of course, but he would be the same whatever happened. He wasn't thinking of him. What concern of his was it that Anne should not give herself to Maurice? He knew well enough that he was concerned, even passionately concerned, about it. The idea that he might be in love with her did not worry him. He always had been, more or less; every sensible person was. Was it that Anne derogated from herself? She didn't. She was just the same, only more perfectly herself. Besides, he had never troubled that she had been married to Cradock; he had only begun to think about it when she had left him. That was curious. The idea of her with Cradock, ever since he could remember her years ago, overawed him now. He didn't want her to have to go through that again. Oh, he was being silly about her. As if she didn't know infinitely more about it than he!

Dennis was disillusioned and inclined to be cynical of himself. Anne and Maurice were talking about bedrooms.

"Morry says you won't mind a camp bed in the front room," said Anne.

"No, I'm used to it. . . . I think it's the best room in the house."

"Anne's going to have the piano there, when it comes," said Maurice.

"Oh." Dennis was indifferent. He would rather hear of Anne's intentions from herself. At all events he did not need Maurice to interpret for him. He glanced at Anne.

"Yes, we arranged it this morning." She spoke very remotely.

"So you're improving, Morry," he said.

"Improving? How do you mean?"

"You haven't forgotten why you moved from Chelsea to Vauxhall?"

Maurice laughed uneasily. "That's all past. I was only a fool then. Because I hadn't anything in my head, I had to find excuses. Why, you said that yourself." Maurice

explained to Anne. "I moved out of my rooms in Chelsea, because the man next door would play the piano. . . . I don't know why Dennis should drag it up just now. It's all different. He knows what it was as well as I do. I was all nervy then—impatient to be doing something, and nothing in my head. Anything would have irritated me. If it hadn't been the piano, it would have been the milkman. I had to have an excuse. Of course, I was quite serious at the time. . . . I moved to the Surrey side. But you understand the condition I was in, don't you?"

Anne nodded thoughtfully. "Quite well," she said. "I did the very same thing myself—in Leipsic of all places."

Maurice crept under the generous wing and felt strong. Then he was almost ashamed of the support Anne had given him. Shame at the cowardice of this shame chased it out of his mind. He rose from his chair and sat on the floor at Anne's feet. He took her hand which rested on the chair-arm and placed it against his cheek. It was cool. His own face was flushed. He felt Anne's other hand steal round his face, gently clasping his forehead and caressing his hair. His own insufficiency tormented him. He wanted to take Anne's hand and put it away from his forehead, to assert himself independent and free. He was too much of a coward. The conviction crushed him into collapse; he was inert, with a mere shadow of a control over his words.

"That business with the piano at Chelsea was only cowardice. I don't see how one can help being a coward. Sometimes I forget about it, that's all. But what's the use of pretending? The only reason that keeps us from being really honest is sheer cowardice. And what's cowardice—my cowardice, anyway? It's only a cursed, silly, empty pride. I'm too proud to say I'm a liar. How the hell do you get out of that?" His words contrasted with the weary note in his voice. There was no answer, save that Anne passed the tips of the fingers of her encircling

hand gently over his forehead. He felt that the motion was instinctive, almost physical and unconscious, while she herself was far away intent on what he said. "Oh, I'm a fool," he said and laughed, evilly contemptuous of himself.

Then he burst out. "My God, and that's cowardice, too. I haven't got the courage to stick by my own words, even when they're the best I've got. No wonder I..."

"What's the use...?" said Dennis.

"There isn't any."

"But listen. Do you think you're any worse than me? I can tell you that you aren't..."

"That doesn't make it any better."

"Yes, it does—better for you, anyhow. Listen, man. I know what you're driving at. You call it cowardice, because you won't face yourself. You call it pride because you think if you did face yourself you'd have to call it empty, and you won't do that. But the truth is, you don't know yourself. How should you? Do I know myself? I'm self-conscious and so are you, but that's all on the outside. The inside's just unknown. When you say that sometimes you manage to forget about the cowardice, that's only words. Then sometimes, your known and your unknown, your self-consciousness and yourself—call them anything—just come together. You forget you're a coward, because you know you aren't. It is no use telling me that when you were beside that pool this morning you only forgot. You *weren't*.

"I don't say we aren't cowards, and I don't say what you said isn't true—but it's only half the truth. The reason why you aren't honest, is because you can't be. If you could tell the last word of truth about your self-consciousness, it would only be a lie after all. You may be a coward in not telling the last word, but I know there's more in it, and that is that somehow you know always that it would be a lie." He turned to Anne. "Isn't that true, Anne?" he said.



"Very likely," she said.

"Yes, I'll believe that," went on Maurice, "but that won't get me past my conviction that I am a coward, will it? I know I'm afraid to tell the truth, when there's only the truth in front of me. It doesn't make any difference if I afterwards believe it wasn't going to be the whole truth. No, as far as I can see, if I were really to act by what you say, I should only be a bigger liar than ever. You say that it's only because we can't ever tell the truth about ourselves. I don't deny it. But is that a reason why I should pretend to have a feeling that I haven't, and pretend not to have a feeling that I have? That's what I mean by cowardice, and that's the kind of coward I am. You want to make out that I do it because I'm afraid of telling a lie about myself. I know that I do it because I'm afraid. . . ." He was going to say, "afraid of hurting other people," but something held the words back, and he stopped, automatically repeating, "because I'm afraid."

"Go on," said Anne quietly.

He turned round and looked at her face, alarmed as though she had heard his unspoken words. She only smiled at him. "That's all there is," he said.

"I thought you were going to say what you were afraid of."

"So I was, but I don't know now." He paused half-way from raising himself from the floor. "At all events, you've cured me, Dennis."

He stood between Dennis and Anne, looking vacantly at the space between them. Standing apart from them, yes, he was better. He thrust one hand into his pocket and with the other pushed back his hair from his forehead, giving a quick backward jerk to his head as if to shake himself free of something. In his mind he searched for the reason for Dennis's words. It was strange that they had nothing to do with what he called his cowardice, for Dennis generally understood. That he should have mistaken him was almost incredible. A suspicion that Dennis had done it wilfully

came into his mind and baffled him. He began to be frightened of a new and inscrutable Dennis, and though for a moment he thought that Dennis might never have been a coward, he rejected it immediately. He was sure that Dennis knew what he meant.

Another thought emerged into the vacant turmoil. Dennis had tried to prevent him from hurting Anne, by covering, magnifying and changing what he had said. He could see that quite plainly now. Instead of resenting it, for the first time in his life he thought Dennis a fool, and he had a moment of intense superiority to him. As if Anne could be deceived as to what he had meant! He was coward enough to avoid saying the last actual words, simply because he could not bring himself to hear them spoken and echoing terribly through the room. But Anne understood; of that he was certain. And instantly he flamed against Anne's understanding. Her generosity choked him. In a tyrannous vision he saw himself deliberately hurting, hurting her. He was catching hold of her arm and twisting it horribly and slowly, while she stood quite still. His teeth pressed against each other and the muscles of his jaw stiffened. While he watched, he knew that he was too great a coward to do it. "Too great a coward to do it," he thought, "why, I'm too great a coward to say it." He was still tossing the hair back from his forehead, when he laughed. He knew that his laugh was like a hot barb entering into Anne's flesh, and yet, though his impulse was to stop, he could not.

"I sometimes think there's a devil in me," he said quietly. "Yes, really, I mean it. I feel sometimes there's positive evil in me. You don't know the way I can hate myself. That's what I mean by the evil. When I laugh at myself, it might be some evil power laughing at my weakness. Yes, that's what it is, it's a power laughing at my weakness. . . . Yes"—he spoke as though he were meditating with himself—"that's the real evil—the knowledge that we haven't the power to do what we desire. Isn't

that right?" The sound of his voice changed at the question. It was hopeful instead of despairing, triumphant after overwhelmed.

"That's a discovery," he went on eagerly. "Don't you see? It's evil when I'm conscious of a desire, and conscious that I haven't the courage to realise it. Why, you can see why it's evil. It's acknowledging defeat inside yourself. It's a kind of conflict with no issue, and conflict only takes its meaning from the result. But this kind is one that absolutely depends on there being no result, and you can see that that simply must be evil.

"God, how plain it is. . . . And I can see the way out, can't you? Of course, there are two. You can do what you desire. No, that's no good. That chance is gone. The evil begins because it's gone. The only thing to do is to see that you don't desire what you thought you desired. And you don't. For instance. . . ." He was on the point of saying that he desired to torture Anne, but he stopped himself.

"Well, you don't really want to do all the things you think you want to. . . . But what if you don't quite know? You don't know whether it's courage or cowardice which stops you. Yes, that's it. Most of the time we don't know. Mostly, it seems like cowardice. I'm not sure, but I've an idea that it's only sentimentality. I sentimentalise about a person who always acts on his impulse; but after all there is no reason why he should. Perhaps it's only the easier way. When I don't act on impulse I always know that I'll have to go through any amount of this torment about cowardice—and that doesn't seem to be very cowardly, does it?

"Where have I got to? It all seems very convenient anyway. If you act on impulse, well and good, you do it unconsciously, so that must be all right. And so soon as you're conscious of an impulse, it isn't an impulse any longer, so there's not the slightest reason why you should act on it at all—in fact there's every reason why you



shouldn't. Very comfortable indeed—very comfortable." Maurice laughed quite happily. "Of course you always go on thinking you're a coward, but that's one of the diseases we inherit, we suppose. . . . It's wonderful what a lot a rotten argument will do. . . ."

"That's all right, then," said Dennis, "but you know it's not so very different from what I said before."

Maurice pondered a moment. "Isn't it exactly the same?"

"I believe it is."

"Well, that's funny. What you said sounded all wrong at the time. I wonder why."

"I think it's because it *was* all wrong," said Anne. Her words were unexpected and Maurice turned sharply towards her. She bent forward, leaning her chin upon her hands and her elbows upon her knees, and went on speaking slowly. "You see you were being honest then, feeling honestly at any rate. Dennis was making excuses. He may have thought it was true, but he didn't believe it was. Neither did you, of course."

"What about what I said just now—about evil? Wasn't that true, either?"

"Not very. Perhaps you started with something true, but you couldn't keep it up. You begin to theorise about it and you lose the truth you hold. You're happy enough to lose it, too—why not?"

"You mean I *am* a coward then?"

"Yes—you are. There's nothing very terrible in that. But what's the good of trying to forget it? You know what you feel, and yet you won't say it. I can feel you holding it back. And what happens? It only turns in upon itself and gets contorted and exaggerated. That's when the evil begins, I think. Why aren't you quite honest? You think it's because you're afraid of hurting me, or anybody else. But that's only an insult to me. It might hurt for a moment, but I shouldn't mind—not one bit. And it'd be easy to get rid of it, too, for that matter.

But the real truth is that you're afraid of hurting yourself. You feel that it might hurt me, but it would certainly hurt you more. That's why you are a coward. But you know it as well as I do. What you do forget sometimes is that I know it as well as you do. It isn't new to me either. I have known it all the while. But I hate to think that you feel that you are hiding it successfully from me."

Although he was surprised by the words, Maurice was not hurt. There was no note of indignation or recrimination in them to rouse him to hostility. Curiously he thought, "I'm glad of that"; and he was truly glad, for he knew that if there had been the faintest hint of a pretext he would have been sullen in his own defence. Instead of that he felt safe. Anne had touched him very close, closer than he had ever been touched before, consciously, yet so touched him that the contact was like a caress. A burden had been removed from him, and his responsibility for himself seemed to dissolve away.

"Yes, I know," he said, "but it's hard to realise that you're understanding me. And very often I resent it. I can't help it. I feel that I don't want to be understood, that I lose too much by it. I want you to understand me only when I ask you to, and the rest of the time I want to be a mystery. That's just my nature. But it isn't really my nature—at least I don't think it is—when I try to deceive you about what I'm thinking or feeling. But then why do I do it? I don't know. Perhaps I won't after this."

"Perhaps not—but, I think you will all the same," said Anne. "And that will be right," she continued after a pause. Then she raised her head a little and looked at him. The look in her eyes held his. He knew that he would always remember it. He knew he saw pity there, and he thought that he saw fear—for he wondered about it afterwards; but what held him altogether was the calm of her eyes, not the calm of insensibility or resolution, but of com-

plete repose, of balance, of harmony. Yes, that was the word. The very word was mysterious to him. It had for years, even of his life, been dear to him. Seldom had he any glimmering of its meaning, but there were days when it had passed from being merely a word to a symbol of something remotely seen, infinitesimally apprehended. He found himself speaking the word now inwardly to his own mind.

"Yes, that will be right," said Anne again, as though in answer to some question out of herself.

Suddenly Anne's words chilled Maurice. With them she put him away for ever. He wanted to cry out to her: "Oh, don't say that, . . . don't say that." He could not. Instead he gathered his strength together.

"Anne, I want to tell you something," said Maurice.

"Are you sure?"

He pondered a moment. "Yes, I am sure," he said. "You listen, too, Dennis."

Maurice's manner of speech was changed. His voice was slow and even, monotone and almost drawling.

"I had a lover once. It seems a long while ago, but it can't be much more than two years—in Paris. I was as old as I am now (thus he answered himself about to say 'I was very young'). I didn't want to be her lover, but I wanted to love her, and I wanted her to love me. I think it was because I was miserable and alone. I went there to get away from people, and when I got there I envied every man who had someone to talk to in a café. It was strange, because I loved to be in a place where there were many people and nobody took any notice of me.

"I remember the first time I went to that café. I sat in a corner at a little round table with my back to the people. I'd reckoned that I had a franc to spend in the café every night, so I drank two large beers, because I knew the word for that, because they would last me a long while, and



because they made just a franc together. When the time came to go—it was just twelve o'clock—I put the franc under the saucer and got up for my hat.

“A little waiter with big moustaches—I found after he was called Léonce—came up to clear away. I had my back to him, as I was doing up my coat. Then I heard him say behind me :

“ ‘ Et la service ? ’ ”

“I heard quite plainly. I could have written out the words. I turned round to him and saw him angrily picking up my money. But I could not understand what he meant. I must have known what he meant, but it terrified me so that my brain went still. Then he said it again fiercely : ‘ Et la service ? ’ ”

“I stared at him and knew that my lips were trembling. He just threw himself back (ridiculous, like a stage Frenchman) and looked at me. Then I realised what was the matter. Suddenly I went sick and faint. I pulled out some coppers and tried to say something like ‘ pardon.’ But I knew immediately that he was convinced that I had done it deliberately. He said, ‘ Mer-ci, Monsieur,’ in a way that withered me, and as I pushed my way through the swinging doors with my coat all open and my hat in my hand I knew the people were laughing at me, that the waiter was talking to them about me. I remember the great stride with which I burst into the street. I was blind with insult and shame, and I walked to the river, all the way in the middle of the road, so that no one should see me or be able to speak to me. I forget what happened afterwards. It was three days before I had enough courage to go into that café again, and then I went in by another door and sat in the farthest corner. I don’t know why I never thought of going to another. Perhaps I’d already seen the woman. Either that or I felt that I was bound to find someone there.

“But all that doesn’t matter at all. I only told you that for you to see the condition I was in. I found my girl

eventually. Yes, I must have been in love with her. I remember how in the three weeks after we first met we used to walk in the cold weather up the Rue de la Sorbonne and she used to laugh. When she was happy she used to have all sorts of quick movements, throwing her head forwards and backwards ; and she had a new hat with a long wavy brown feather that hung down behind, the kind of hat you see in old-fashioned pictures of women on horse-back. I remember the way that feather used to wave better than anything else in the time before we were lovers. That happened on the day before I had to come back to England. I had to go back. I was still keeping terms.

“ Yes, I *was* in love with her. I remember how I used to be sick with a sort of fever all day until she came to see me. That last day we were together in the café all the evening with a friend of hers called Simone, who wore a brown velvet hat with a big brim with an edging of brown fur. She was very fond of me, too, and always called me ‘ Monsieur Maurice.’ But I was very wretched. After some time Simone went, but just before she looked at me with a smile I’ve never forgotten—yes, it was a wonderful smile. I can’t remember anything so kind—and said to Madeleine : ‘ Il va chez vous, n’est-ce pas ? C’est bien. C’est triste qu’il va partir.’ She was looking at me all the while. Madeleine was at my side. ‘ Vous allez coucher ensemble ? ’ I just looked at her. I was nervous and frightened. I didn’t know how to explain. . . . I felt that I was in the middle of something I didn’t understand, something incalculable. . . . ‘ Vous ne l’avez pas encore fait ? ’ I dropped my eyes to the table. I knew Simone was looking at Madeleine. Then I managed to glance at Madeleine too. She was curiously quiet and sad. Simone went away.

“ We didn’t stay long after that. Madeleine said she hated the place, and that we mustn’t stay there any longer. And so we went. It was very dark in the block of flats

where she lived and I had to go quietly so that they should not hear me. When we got to her room, she kept on saying to me 'tu m'aimes.' I don't remember what I said. I don't remember either how she got into bed. Somehow I think that I was looking at the pictures on the wall with my back turned to her. I turned round to go and sit on the bed beside her. Then I lay beside her on the top of the bed. I remember the strange feeling of the coverlet between us. It was hard, and it outlined her back. It didn't strike me at the time that it was funny she should turn her back to me. She rose on her elbow and looked at me. She was biting her lip, and she had been crying. 'Tu me fais mal,' she said and buried her face in the pillow away from me. Her hair was dark brown, and it spread all over the pillow. . . .

"Oh, that's not really what I wanted to say at all. It was some days before that happened. I was living right at the top of a little hotel near the Luxembourg, where two tramlines met. Every day she used to come for me at seven, and we used to have dinner together and then go on to the café. The only way I could get through the day till then was by staying in bed. I hardly ever got up before five o'clock. I used to shave myself before the mirror in the wardrobe, and I used to arrange it so that by leaving the door open I could see her as she came upstairs. I cut myself very often, and I cut myself badly on this particular night. I could never hold the razor quite steady. I forgot to say that in the next room lived a man who was a great friend of mine then, called Stephen French. He liked Madeleine. I'm not sure even that he did not love her more than I did—I wonder. . . . Anyhow, Madeleine didn't like him. I never quite understood why, but I think it was because she thought he made jokes at us together.

"Well, that night she was late. She had said that perhaps she would be, but I didn't pay any attention to that. I expected her at seven o'clock. Almost always she



arrived when I was shaving, but this time she didn't, and I cut myself. I went into Stephen's room to get some wool to stop the bleeding, and he asked me what was the matter. I said that she hadn't come, although he knew, because his door was always open a little way. 'Oh,' he said, 'don't you remember she said that she might be late to-night? Why, you told me yourself.' He also said something about the chalkiness of my face, and I looked in his mirror. It surprised me that I did look so chalky. I remember I noticed then that my cheeks ached, because I was holding my teeth together very hard. Also I felt sick as though my stomach and bowels had somehow been relaxed. I went back to my own room and sat down in a chair. All the while I had my eyes on the clock so that I knew that I had waited ten minutes before Stephen came in. It was then that something deliberate came into my brain. I don't know how to describe it; but it made me say to him, 'I can't stick it,' though it wasn't true at all. I said I was going to try to sleep and that I was tired, and while he was there I got on to the bed and lay down with my face to the wall. I got so close to the wall that the whole length of my body was pressed against it. Stephen, I remember, wanted to bring in a rug and throw it over me; but I managed not to have that. I shut my eyes. There was something peculiar in the roughness of the sleeve of a brown coat I wore when it pressed against my face. . . . Funny that everything was brown now I come to think of it, everything except Madeleine's stockings. . . . I don't remember what I thought about. All I know is that my mind seemed to get harder and harder.

"After a time—not very long—I heard her coming up the stairs. I always knew her step. This time she was hurrying. I jammed myself up close to the wall. I didn't see her come in; but by her steps I knew that she had just come in, and seen me on the bed, and gone out again. I heard her ask Stephen a question why I was asleep, but I did not catch his answer. She burst into my room and

flung herself on the bed, crying bitterly. She tried to clasp me in her arms, but I squeezed myself closer to the wall. She kept on asking, 'What have I done to you, what have I done to you?'—but I wouldn't answer her. Instead, I drew apart from her. Then I turned round on to my back and stared steadily at the ceiling. I was quite deliberate. I noticed that she didn't try to clasp me any more, but her arms lay limp on the pillow. Also she began to sob in a way I've never heard anyone sob before. It was a kind of dry gasping. I turned over to look at her. The sobs shook her violently, and it seemed as though her body wouldn't yield to them any more. She seemed to be strangely stiff, and I thought that something material and physical in her would break. So she lay beside me with her head in the pillow and her hands just clutching the coverlet, while these dry sobs kept on bursting inside her, and I looked at her.

"I can see it all now, but what I can see most is the hardness of her body. It looked all strained. Then quite deliberately I put my arms round her—how hard she was—and tried to kiss her. She neither responded to nor prevented me, but lay quite still except for the sobs. I kissed her again and again and called to her. All my deliberation went. I was simply mad for a response. Then she lifted her head and looked at me. Her lips were all swollen and her eyes dull and lifeless, full of tears. When the sobs passed through her, her neck jerked and her lips flung open and trembled. That's about all I remember. I think I was sorry for her. I know that I was trembling violently in spite of myself, and my hands and my chin jerked suddenly every now and then. Also I remember watching her throat a long while after—perhaps a quarter of an hour—while she was trying to tidy herself before the glass. A great lump seemed to be running up and down it, and to have something to do with her lips which kept on opening. When we went out of the hotel together, she held her head down and her hand over her mouth as though she were

walking in the teeth of the wind, and she held my hand so tightly that it hurt.

"I wonder if you think it's curious that I should tell a story like that. I mean it doesn't seem to be a story at all. I know that I've never thought of it from that day till this. I've told it just as I remembered it, because . . . I wanted to just then. I don't know why."

Maurice knelt down before Anne and rested his head in her lap. He wanted to be near her. At first he waited for some question from Anne about Madeleine: "Had he seen her again?" or, "What had happened after that?" No question came, and though he was glad she had not asked, he was disappointed. Then he thought that Anne might have been hurt. Almost immediately he knew that she was not hurt, though he knew nothing of what she was feeling. He wanted to ask her: but while he struggled against a sense of unfitness, a moral anticlimax, Dennis's voice saved him.

"You've let me in for something—asking me down here. I don't think I'd have come if I'd known. . . ."

Maurice began to bite his lip, and to work his chin roughly against his hand. He took hold of Anne's hand and rested it in her lap, where Dennis, sitting against the wall behind them, could not see. He meant to kiss the hand, but he could not do it quickly. Leaning his head sideways on Anne's lap he watched himself stroke her hand.

Dennis spoke again. "I think it was wonderful. . . . I shall be trying to do it myself if I'm not careful. . . . But I don't think it's quite the thing for Saturday afternoon"—he looked at his watch—"or Saturday evening, which it is now."

"What is the time then, Dennis?" asked Anne, turning her head towards him. "Listen. Isn't that someone coming here?"

There was a sound of wheels stopping, then of a heavy jump to the ground. Maurice raised himself and sat back



on his heels, allowing Anne to rise. He smiled at Dennis with small conviction. Then he listened to the noise. "I believe it's Moon," he said. A heavy thud followed. "That's boxes, for sure."

Anne went to the door, but Dennis, who had been sitting close to it, opened it before her. She took the handle from him and Maurice saw their hands involuntarily touch. Dennis drew his away quickly like a man who is afraid of being burnt. So it seemed to Maurice. The movement struck him because it reminded him of Cradock at the door of the dining-room when Anne had first entered into his life. He forgot about it in the excitement of hearing Moon's steps up the path.

"They're very heavy, aren't they, Moon?" said Dennis. "Can't I give you a hand?"

Moon put down the one he was carrying by the door. "I wonder what it is," said Anne, looking at the wooden box bound with iron at the edges.

"Why, it's your box," said Maurice. "Isn't it, Dennis?" Dennis was on the point of going down the path to help Moon with the next. It was an excuse for not replying. "I know it is," said Maurice, "I saw it in the station this afternoon."

"We'll take the other two round to the back," sang out Dennis, now a vague shadow in the yellow light of the gig lamp. "They're too heavy to bring through. You'll have to unpack them first."

"Right-oh!" replied Maurice, and he went through the kitchen to open the back door. He was surprised to find no light there and only the embers of a fire. He lit the lamp and flung the door wide. Dennis and Moon moved heavily under the burden of the box, and slowly set it inside by the door. "Why, Anne, it's my books. They've come already," he called to her. "That's quick work, isn't it?"

"I'm very glad," said Anne, and she looked out at the yellow gleam, and the little space won by two candles from

the night. Carts calling at distant cottages in the dark, trains roaring through desolate stations in the night, both had fascinated her from childhood. She stood and watched.

Dennis welcomed the weight of the box under which he staggered round the house. It held him down. He had been on the point of telling some long rigmarole about himself. Now that Moon's arrival had saved him, he had a horror of the threatened confession, and yet he felt he would have been happier had he made it. "Damn it all," he said to himself, "what a thing to do." For all that he was envious of Maurice and could not believe his own suggestion that Maurice had only made a fool of himself. Nevertheless, he was grateful for the weight of the last box, as with Moon's help he laid it ponderously on top of the other.

"They must have come this afternoon," said Maurice to Moon. "I was in to Pirford to meet Mr. Beauchamp this morning."

"They came while I was at the station, sir. I only just had room for them. I wasn't expecting to go in to-day, the missis wanted some things urgent."

"Well, it was lucky they were there, and very good of you to bring them along. I'm very glad to have them."

"Not at all, sir," said Moon, replying to the commendation. "It's a nasty night, black as pitch under the hill, and the roads are wellnigh washed away by that rain. We're in for a fair mess, Kitty and me." (Kitty was the mare.) "Good night, sir, good night, Mr. Beauchamp."

"Anne, did you know there's hardly any fire here?"

She turned to say good night to Moon before she shut the door and came to the kitchen. "I told Alice to let it out. I said she could go out this afternoon provided she left everything ready."

"Isn't anyone hungry?" asked Maurice.

"Perhaps we'd better have supper in any case. It's

late. What time did you say it was, Dennis?" said Anne.

Dennis took some seconds to realise the question. He was slowly filling a pipe. "I've forgotten," he said, and pulled out his watch again. "Twenty-five minutes past eight," he said.

"That's me," said Maurice, leading the way out of the kitchen with the loaded tray in his hands. "I must have been in a queer state." Neither Dennis nor Anne made any reply. Maurice shifted the lamp to the wall and set the tray in the middle of the table. He bent down and poked the fire, shaking the kettle to see if it was full. "We had better have some tea at the same time. We missed it this afternoon," and he placed the kettle on the fire.

They began a conversation at the supper table. The talk was pleasant but fatigued, like an activity that follows a natural exhaustion of the body. . . . For the most part it circled round Dennis's professional success. Dennis was at first very reluctant; but when Anne suggested that he should come down next week, he had to acknowledge he had been invited to the Midlands to lecture on psychology. Maurice seized the opening and forced him to confess that the invitation was honorific and the lectures well paid. Gradually, thenceforward, he warmed to his theme and told Maurice more about his prospects than he cared to hear. Maurice's delighted interest cooled. Contrasting Dennis's success with his own instability, he resented it. Nevertheless, he found a recondite pleasure in insisting that Dennis should diminish nothing of the brilliance of his prospects. Dennis responded to the insistence with enjoyment. In part he became intoxicated with the smoothness of his own future.

"It's a pity," said Anne, "you don't really want it at all. You make it seem so worth having."

Dennis was silent for some while after that; but Maurice did not notice the effect of Anne's words. He was anxious to set something of his own over against Dennis's achieve-



ment. But that was not the only reason for his remark, for he put into it more sincerity and conviction than would have come from that alone. Moreover, he himself was aware of some inconsequence in what he said. "I am glad my books have come," he said, in a pause. "I never feel *really* safe without them."

After supper Maurice started some tentative reminiscent talk about their first meeting at the dinner party, but Anne, leaning back in her chair, and stroking the back of her hand with a cameo that hung at the end of a silver chain round her neck, appeared to pay little attention, being full of thought or dreams. Dennis, too, was disinclined, but he roused himself to interest at one moment, and asked if Maurice remembered his tirade about the harmony. Anne began to listen and to watch Maurice then. He was anxious to be rid of the subject. "I remember talking about it, but very little of what I said. What is vivid to me, extraordinarily vivid, is the way I was standing at the corner of the fireplace. I can feel my shoulder against the mantelpiece now. That's rather curious, considering that I'm sure I didn't notice that at the time. But I've almost forgotten what I said, and if I did remember I'm certain that I shouldn't know what I meant. It wouldn't be the first time that that had happened. It must be a pretty common experience for people, I should imagine."

Dennis reminded him of a phrase.

"Did I say that? How you do remember these things! . . . No, I have just a notion what I meant. But I'm too tired even to worry about trying to get it clear."

"And I can hardly keep awake," said Anne. "I'm going up to bed now." She lit candles, while Maurice put out the lamps, and went upstairs after bidding Dennis good night. A minute later Dennis and Maurice followed. Dennis paused, leaning idly on the banisters, as though he wished to continue the talk. Maurice waited a little, but

Dennis said nothing. Maurice grew impatient and restive. He could not go into Anne's room before Dennis's eyes. "Oh, I've forgotten. . . . I must go down again," he said abruptly. "Good night, Dennis." He ran precipitately down the stairs and waited idly by the fire, until he heard Dennis's door close. Then he came up very quietly. He entered Anne's room softly and without knocking. Anne was sitting before the mirror to brush her hair, but she had forgotten, and her brush hung down in her forgetful hand. When he reached the bed he saw her reflection start, as, suddenly reminded of her purpose, she began to brush again.

"Did I frighten you?" he whispered.

"Yes, a little," she answered, looking in the glass straight into his eyes. He felt guilty. He wanted to clasp her from behind and kiss her, but he could do no more than to say:

"Your hair's very beautiful, Anne. It's so full of life. It looks so springy."

"Is it? It feels very dead to me to-night; but I think that's my imagination."

He was nervous of her speaking so loud. Anxiously he tried to keep his voice within a whisper. "Yes . . . it doesn't look dead."

The words had a raucous choking sound.

"What's the matter, Morry?"

"Nothing," he said abruptly, sitting on the bed and staring at his dangling legs.

"We're not committing adultery," she said quietly, and went on slowly brushing her dark hair. She fingered it delicately, each several hair like a tender nerve. Maurice glanced up, surprised that she had divined his thought. He saw her smiling gently in the dim light, and his apprehension dissolved away.

Maurice laughed, as it were, with a physical reservation. Anne immediately was grave as she had been when he entered the room. He slowly undressed.

"Anne," he said, after a while, hesitant, "did you . . . hate . . . my telling that about Madeleine . . . ?"

"No," she said calmly. "Why should I?"

He did not know what he had really wanted her to say, but her answer disappointed him.



## CHAPTER XIV

A PRESENCE radiated always from Anne at the beginning of a day. She was half-conscious of it herself. Perhaps it was that she was always glad of a day beginning, and that the change after night had never ceased to hold an element of miracle for her. "A freshet of dawn," said Dennis to himself, and began to wonder what the words meant—for him they were poised between being torrential with significance and absolutely meaningless—and where he could have got hold of them.

"No, it's no good," she said. Dennis had proposed a long walk over the hills, "somewhere for some lunch." "You can see that he's simply yearning to unpack his books."

"I'm not," said Maurice with sturdy indifference. Nevertheless, he began to flush.

"Yes, he's convicted," said Dennis. "After an abominable yesterday to waste to-day. Well . . ."

"But we live in it, remember."

"Yes, that's true. I dare say it'll do as a kind of excuse. . . . How long will they take you?"

"Well, I shall have to stack them away. It's a longish job. You know as well as I do. If I start now I shan't finish until the afternoon."

"You won't wait for him till then? It's foolish," said Anne.

"I did have a vague thought of helping."

"Oh, no," protested Maurice. "You mustn't do that. That's unfair. . . . If you do I shall *have* to come out. . . . Why don't you and Anne go for a walk? I'll be ready if you come back for lunch. . . . You could go the way we

went the other afternoon, our first walk. Anne knows the way . . . ”

“ No,” she interposed quickly, “ I think I’d better have a change. It wouldn’t do to go the same way. There must be plenty of walks that we haven’t been. . . . Yes, I should like to go with you, Dennis,” she went on, “ provided you don’t walk me too far or too fast.”

“ Why not go up to the Ring ? It’s a glorious day : and it’ll be clear, most likely, on the top. You’ll be able to see the sea quite near you—unless the rain’s left a mist.” He went to the window. “ I don’t think so—nothing that you can see out of here anyhow. Dunbury Ring—you know it, Dennis ? ”

Dennis looked uncertain.

“ Well, you remember that old chalkpit beyond Waribone’s Farm, where you slipped down in the rain ? Last year, that must have been in August. . . . What a long time ago it does seem ! ” Maurice explained to Anne. “ It was muddy and he couldn’t get a foothold. He ripped a great piece out of his trousers—three-cornered—and I had to fasten it up with a safety-pin.” Dennis looked quizzical at the recollection. “ I pointed it out to you then. I remember you said the Ring was the colour of a fine plum. There’s a path straight up to it from the chalkpit, and on top you can see your way down—any amount of them.”

“ I remember now,” said Dennis. “ Are you sure you would really like to go, Anne ? ” She had hardly listened to the conversation, hardly even comprehended Maurice’s explanation. The question took her by surprise, which endured while Dennis continued : “ I don’t want to drag you out. I’m afraid you may have some idea that because he’s failed in his duty, you have to do it for him. I shall be quite happy alone ; but, of course, if you do come . . . I’ll enjoy it more.”

“ Dennis, don’t be foolish. I’ll come because I want to.” She hurried away to get ready, and in a few moments

Maurice was watching the two walk down the path together. As they passed out of the range of the window, he wished that he had gone. So final did this parting seem that they might have left him for ever ; only a sense of the necessity of independence and self-sufficiency held him back from following them. It would have been so childish. Before his mind a little picture of a child's round legs twinkling precipitately after his mother persisted and made him smile wretchedly. He was miserably doubtful of the independence he guarded.

He sat for a long while in a chair before the yellow fire, his legs stretched in a straight line before him, and his hands thrust to the bottom of his pockets, thinking of nothing, but shrouded in a forlornness which became almost comfortable. At length he moved wearily into the kitchen, and began to prise open his boxes. The prospect which had excited him an hour before now was grey with ugly and interminable labour. By turns he was listless and over-violent in his actions, but careless in both. He tore his finger upon an upturned nail, and purposely paid no regard to the blood which dropped at sluggish intervals over his possessions. He lumped the books together on the floor, and paused half-way through the contents of the first box to look at the depressing heap, while he sat on a chair silently cursing. The day was cold enough to chill the surface of his skin all over. The blood from his finger chilled to stickiness. He was utterly miserable.

He began to crawl upstairs with armloads of books. When they fell he laughed as though the annoyance were inevitable, and slowly redescended to pick them up again ; but once at the top of the stairs when half his load poured like liquid from his grasp, he turned savagely and threw the rest after them. He almost wept with rage, sitting on the landing, before he could go down to gather them again. He carried the rest with a dour determination, as resolved to inflict upon himself the last torture of self-humiliation. He sat down on the seat into which his peculiar bed col-



lapsed when out of use, and wondered whether he could find the strength to arrange the books decently upon their shelves. Indescribably confused, upside down, they had taken on a malicious personality. To one well-used French book that lay fanwise upon the floor he gave a vicious kick, scattering the pieces, and then picked them up and began the labour of putting them in order again. He tied them together and put them in a drawer.

He had done this before he realised that the book was not French at all, but a German novel that Cradock had lent him at his request for something to read, at a time when he was anxious to learn German. Endeavouring idly to fix the date when he had borrowed it, he discovered with a start that it was hardly two months ago. The fulness of those months bewildered him, and while he probed about into his memory, he realised with wonder that this was the last book he had attempted to read. From this solid point, while he slowly untied the parcel and searched mechanically about for the last of his pencil-marks, he slowly let form in his mind the occasion ; the time just before the dinner party, the servant's knock at the door with the hot water, and a letter. . . .

He had never read that letter. . . . Oh, yes, he had seen that it had come from his mother, and he was always glad to postpone reading letters which only served to worry him and make him miserable. . . . He began to wonder whether it had really been his mother's handwriting, for it was not clear in his recollection. He was anxious to know what he had done with it. . . . No, he wouldn't have thrown it away. He never threw letters away unopened, because he was afraid. Instead he let them lie about in the fragile hope that they would hide themselves and pass into a natural oblivion, for which he could plead to himself that he was not responsible. He leant back and closed his eyes in the effort completely to recreate the picture. . . . He must have put it in some book—that was a fairly common habit of his.

What was he reading? The German novel, of course. That meant a notebook and a dictionary.

What was the good of worrying it out like that? Somehow he *knew* that the letter was in the dictionary. He seemed to have known it all along—and there the dictionary lay in a broken, dirty calf binding close to his hand on the lowest shelf. He knew, and yet he carefully sought out the notebook, went carefully through it page by page, and finally held it by the back and shook it. He was even surprised when he found the letter where his dictionary fell apart. He stared at the writing, and a tremor of physical apprehension passed from his bowels to his fingers. He stared at it still. It was in the old familiar writing to which he had grown accustomed weekly during years of school. The old familiar sensations surged back upon him, with a peculiar appositeness, a magnified significance. He was the same, yet wholly different. His division of soul was the same. Then the apprehension of some gentle scolding, of the tired tolerance, whose sting was the love which even then he did not fail to feel, for some expected letter unreceived or some request for money which could not be afforded, but was sent, warred with a terrible fear which beset him when the Monday letter did not come, and he waited through hours of agonising afternoons on the slender hope of the evening post. When the letter came, tossed over the heads of forty school boys sitting sedately after evening prayers, he would gasp with joy, put the letter in his pocket, and forget it utterly for days.

Like a warm flood of repentant tears the wave of recollection passed over him. He was still fingering the letter, upon the book which lay in his lap. He laughed miserably. That self of a few short years ago was a caricature of the self of to-day, so bitingly faithful, so justly microscopic. Wherein was he different now? he asked himself despairingly. A sudden perception, agonisingly clear, gave him the answer. The apprehensions were the same. They had the same quality. Only now they went deeper. Only now

they were bigger. His lips moved automatically to a forgotten refrain that he had used jeeringly to sing to the boys who passed from lower to upper school, from one world to another.

He can brush his own clothes  
And blow his own nose,  
For he's getting a big boy now. . . .

With an effort he stiffened his resolution, talking aloud to himself. "What the devil's a letter, you fool? It can't hurt you, it can't hit you, it can't bite you, it can't. . ." Slipping his thumb under the flap he tore it open suddenly, as though to surprise himself with the accomplished fact.

A sheet of written note-paper and another letter. In an agony of haste he hid it in his pocket, seeking to steady himself by staring at the written sheet, and by a physical straining of his eyes to penetrate the mist that swam cloudy before it. He laid the letter down on the seat and rose to regard himself in the round mirror that hung over his chest of drawers. He pinched his pale cheeks, and held his lids down over his eyes, to rub their shining empty focus away. Even then memories danced malignant in his brain—above all that which he had recreated for himself out of a grateful dimness last night—his face in the mirror larded clown-like with a foam of soap, and two frightened eyes, as he had waited for Madeleine. . . . He hardened the sinews of his mind against importunate memory, and sat down once more with a leaden composure to read and comprehend the big straggling words which his mother had written.

"MORRY DARLING,

"I do not know where to send this letter. I know who it is from. You promised me that you would never write to her again that morning in the dining-room at Wimbledon. But I can't see that it would matter now when you don't even care enough for me to let me know



where you are living. Perhaps you are afraid that I would come and see you. I wouldn't—but I don't even know if you are alive. If you only knew what I have had to suffer in the nights thinking of you. I am sending it to your old address, though I know you don't live there. It may get to you. I can't see that it matters in any case.

“Your always loving MOTHER.

“P.S.—Though I did go to Ebury Street, I wasn't coming to see you. Only I had to know if you were alive.”

He would melt inwardly, become all tears. Instead he laughed, the same miserable laugh. “If you only knew,” he said, “what I am up to now.” He thought of that other letter heavy in his pocket, and immediately became remote. He no longer felt himself, but saw himself, a little man of sorrows. By turns the glasses of his mind coloured him to tragic, to heroic, to inflexible, to callous, but finally and always to petty and ridiculous. It had been a little too much. The whole situation seemed to cancel out in feeling and to reduce to nothingness. His mother, Madeleine, Anne, were little round blobs in his mind that coalesced and dissolved away, leaving behind them only a conscious emptiness.

It was the moment for Madeleine's letter. To him, beaten into a lethargy of indifference, the letter would be indifferent. He pulled it out of his pocket, but paused in the act of opening it, and went downstairs to look at the clock. Twenty-three minutes past twelve. Precisely he calculated that Dennis and Anne would not return from their walk for an hour. They might shorten it and come in upon him suddenly. He considered the possibility and decided that had they shortened the walk they would already have arrived. For the last mile there was nothing to do but to climb on to the hill and return by the ridge.

An hour's freedom was enough. He went upstairs again with steady decision and opened the letter.

He looked at the end of the letter to see if he could read anything in the signature. From the first the curiously decided backward flourish of the last letter of her name had fascinated him, for it had the firm deliberation of a French professional signature. Many times before he had looked to see if the line showed any wavering. During a year he had had time to forget the particularities of her writing ; but he felt sure that the name " Madeleine " was written bigger than it used to be. The flourish showed no deviation from its forerunners. The letters were certainly bigger. " Probably she used a broader pen," he said to himself. The whole letter was indeed blacker than they had used to be.

" MON MAURICE,

" Ton silence m'a conduit au désespoir. Je suis au bout de mes forces. C'est la dernière fois que je t'écris. Il m'affole de penser qu'il y avait un temps où j'étais pleine de joie et de confiance que tu m'aimais de tout ton cœur. Maintenant je suis vide. Malheur que cela ne te dira rien. Tu n'as jamais éprouvé ce qu'il est de se sentir vide. Tu croyais même que je n'allais point voir dans tes dernières lettres que tu étais changé envers moi, et que c'est au moment où je me plaignais, que tu as commencé ton silence. Je ne sais pourquoi je t'écris. Je n'ai pas d'espérance, je n'ai même pas le désir de t'attrister. Tu as choisi. Peut-être c'est ta mère qui t'a fait changer de force, car tu étais si faible—tu m'a fait bien le sentir, mon petit Maurice—mais je sais bien que si ta mère savait jusqu'où l'amour de toi a conduit une femme folle, elle s'adoucirait envers moi. Ainsi si c'est comme je pense toujours, je te supplie de lui montrer ma lettre. Elle est femme, et je suis convaincue qu'elle aura pitié de moi, si tu n'as pas eu la force d'avoir pitié toi-même. Je te supplie de la lui montrer.

“Maintenant je suis au bout. Je reconnais que je ne suis pas fière, moi. Je reconnais que tu ne m’as jamais aimée comme je le croyais. Mais j’ai tant travaillé, j’ai tant souffert, et enfin je suis tellement malade. Tu te souviens de ma phthisie quand j’étais au lit, et tu étais si gentille envers moi. Aie pitié de moi mon Maurice ; je ne demande pas l’amour. Ça, c’est passé—je ne veux rien demander. Je te supplie. De quoi ? Je ne sais plus. J’ai peur de n’être qu’une folle. Ah, mon bien aimé, ne te souviens-tu pas ?—écris-moi un petit mot. Si non, je ne t’écrirai plus. Je serais morte.

“MADELEINE.”

He sat with the letter in his hands, in horror at himself. He saw the words, he understood them, he even felt their significance, but all this passed in an outer shell of him. Within he felt nothing at all, save the strange and keen sensation of his failure to feel, a sensation nearly physical and nearly familiar, as the violent pressure of numbed flesh. Fear there was too, but a fear of the letter as a concrete thing, a living organism with power to hurt and torture him ; and this moved him to tear it across, while he watched the creeping tear, dividing words of sense. Then he hesitated, laid the two parts against each other and placed them in a pocket-book, which he put back in his pocket. He stood up and tidied himself, pulling his clothes down tight against his body, and then went downstairs and out into the garden where he began to gather flowers. For some reason they did not satisfy him, and, keenly remembering the red-white buds of some early May blossom in the lane, he went through the gate snapping and snapping a clumsy jack-knife in his hands.



## CHAPTER XV

PASSING by the edge of the chalkpit, with effort ascending the hill, Anne paused suddenly. Dennis drew up and, in the last completion of an action fading into rest, slowly wheeled round on the hill and faced the prospect.

"What are you thinking about, Dennis?"

He held his peace for a second; then spoke with a non-chalant abruptness.

"D'you really want to know?"

Anne thought and said:

"Yes, tell me."

"Well—I was wondering whether I was really glad that you had come with me. . . . Other things, too, but that most."

"Have you decided?"

"Yes, I'm glad."

"Why?"

"I want to ask you things. I don't think I could have asked you them in the house."

"Do you believe that I will answer them here?"

"I'm sure of that. I was always sure, before. The only question was whether I would have the courage to ask them. Now I'm in a state when I could ask anything."

"Since I said I really wanted to know what you were thinking?"

"Yes."

"I said it deliberately."

"I know you did."

Anne waited for his words. Her breathing, excited by the steady climb, was slowly sinking to evenness. As she waited she felt that it wholly disappeared into calm.

"Why did you go away with Morry?"

"You know why I left Jim?"

"Yes, I know."

"And you ask why I went away with Morry?"

He lifted up his eyes and looked steadily at hers. There was an unfamiliar eagerness in them, and for a moment it seemed that her whole body was leaning forward to him. He knew that he was mistaken before he replied.

"Yes. I still want to know."

Looking at her, he felt that there was some change in her at his words, a change not to be apprehended by the eyes. To him it came as a consciousness of right in what he had said. He was very secure.

"Well—there came a time—when I had to."

He looked his doubts before he spoke them. His foot tapped with a slow impatience on the ground.

"That's—yes, it may be true enough, but that's not what I want. Anybody might say that—any woman—and I'd have to take it. But I want something more from you. You didn't have to leave Jim. At least you did, yet you stayed. You left him when you didn't have to any more. But you explained that. You must explain again. . . . I don't mean you must; but I ask you to."

"I thought Morry needed me."

She spoke with a certain finality, as though the thought and the reality could but be one.

"Do you think so now?"

She thought and said decisively: "Yes, I do."

"But do you think he needs *you*? Not something of you, but *you*. Are you sure of that?"

"No. . . . It's even foolish to speak of not being sure. I know he doesn't need *me*. But I don't ask for that. He needed something of me so much; that I wanted to give it, beyond everything—and I want to now. Then I went away with him. . . . Oh, it wasn't charity and it wasn't blindness. I was glad and I'm glad now."

"But how long will you be glad?"

"Always." She looked at him with eyes that he could not understand. For an instant he thought that she was convincing herself against him. The thought was dissolving from his mind before the question it prompted, when she said :

"Dennis, tell me. For whom are you asking? For Morry, for me, or for yourself?"

He felt instantly that the ground had been taken from beneath him, and he was at the point of smiling at his own discomfiture. Somehow it was too serious for that.

"Yes, go on," he said.

"You're asking for yourself. . . . And there is only one excuse for that—that you should be in love with me, and I in love with you . . ." She paused calmly. "Perhaps there's another," she added, "that you should be you."

The words sang in his ears; but he held himself steady till the time when he could laugh at himself.

"Perhaps it's because you're Dennis," Anne went on, "that you don't really know that you're asking for yourself. You can cheat yourself into the idea that you're asking for me, for Morry, for the Universe itself. And somehow you just stop short at the point where you could not help seeing. D'you understand?"

Dimly he did, but he shook his head.

"What held you back from asking me point-blank whether I thought it was fair to myself? Wasn't it the idea that I should say, 'By what right do you ask?' You'd have seen then that you were asking for yourself. And you wouldn't ask whether I thought it was fair to Morry—for the same reason. And that was the only reason why you didn't ask whether it was fair to yourself, too." She laughed. "I almost believe you could convince yourself that you were asking in the interests of your profession."

Both had become gay. They were happy there on the hill-side. Anne with laughing wind-swept eyes, poised delicately like a reed in the wind upon a hummock of



grass, above; Dennis, who stood sideways to her, as though his mind might have been divided between Anne herself and the prospect of silvery Arun and the distant hills. With his hands in his pockets he stood forlornly smiling. Perhaps he was happy at the sight of his own comic figure, and Anne was happy too, and he twice happy in her happiness.

"We're in the mood to be honest," said Anne. "We will be. You asked for yourself. I'll grant your right to ask because you're Dennis. What does that mean? Not that you are a cool intellect. No one grants anything to that. No, only that you are partly in love with me. You're in love with me the moment that you think somebody else is. You need somebody else to rouse you to assert your claim. And of course that only means there's no claim at all. You don't need me nor anyone else. You are too completely master of yourself. . . . How much you have mastered, I should not like to say; much less than you imagine. You hold your feelings so tight in the ordinary way that when they escape you, you're bewildered, and so you can always excuse yourself convincingly and say that you were out of your mind. It's all wrong. Your abnormal moments are your true ones, but you can't see that yet. Perhaps you need . . . No, but until your criticism magnifies instead of diminishing your feelings, you'll go on in the same old way.

"Yes, I'm very superior, aren't I? You won't be angry with me—with me the inaccessible," she sang, spreading out her arms, and standing tiptoe on her little hill. Her arms sank to her sides like the wings of a bird settled from flight, and she laughed, happily tired.

"Can't we go home by some quicker way? We've wasted so much time," she said.

"No. You could go down now, but it would be longer. The shortest way is to keep up and along the top."

"Very well, come on." They climbed steadily for a quarter of a mile, and rested naturally on the summit at the edge of the Ring.

"Don't you like my explanation? Is it too personal? You haven't said a word since I stopped."

Dennis looked at her with a sideways glance, anxious to divine her purpose, but was reassured.

"I was only thinking if it was true."

"There's not the slightest reason why it should be—none at all. . . . Let's go on. . . ."

Maurice was looking out of the window when they entered the house. He moved to meet Anne, and watched her while she removed her coat and hung it on the door. An admiration of the deliberate and self-contained perfection of her movements held him. "She is mine, she belongs to me," he thought, hardly before the knowledge of the stupidity, the sheer untruth of his claim ebbed back upon him. The very quality of his admiration set distances between them. Distances—and then he was aware of a dumb portion of his soul where the appeals of Madeleine and his mother and his stifled response revolved in mechanical iteration. To silence their incessant motion he spoke, hesitatingly.

"Did you have a good time—both of you?" he added carefully, prompted by some obscure instinct to set Anne completely apart from him.

Anne hung her coat on the door. Dennis entered and checked her reply, if she had intended to speak. As she turned to face Maurice, she saw on the table a great earthenware basin filled with white may.

"But that's terribly unlucky!" she cried suddenly, unawares.

"Is it? I didn't know," said Maurice dully. It chimed too well with his own manifest destiny to surprise him. He hastened to explain away the unmistakable note in his voice. "I might have expected it. I've been in a bad way ever since you left the house. Somehow I got into my head the idea that you were going away for ever and ever, while I watched you going along the lane. I wanted to come after you, but I couldn't. Oh, God, I wish I had—"

it was so lonely. Then it was cold. I couldn't get free from it all the morning. I don't know how I unpacked the books, and then when I'd finished, I wanted to gather flowers. I might have thought they were for putting on my grave—only I didn't. I just wanted to bring in flowers, I suppose. I got some from the garden first and I hated them. The tulips seemed so fat and stupid. I had to throw them away. Then I went and cut some may down the lane. It made me quite cheerful—comparatively, to hack at it. And now it turns out unlucky. No, I'm not surprised."

"How terrible, darling!" she said. She came forward and put her arms on his shoulders. He held her to him, but there was something calculated in the manner of his holding which he could not hide, though he knew she would feel. Again, to excuse himself he said: "It's very hard to fling that clean away. It's made me cold all through. I shall need a lot of thawing." He was dull and insensible to the matter of his lies, but acute in his sense of the manner in which he told them. The necessity to convince Anne pressed upon him, in spite of the conviction that he could not. In his mind he felt "she can't know exactly—not exactly."

She led him to the bowl of white flowers. Still holding his shoulders she leant over, turning her head, to regard them closely. "But they can't be really unlucky . . . they're too beautiful."

While she leant towards the bowl Maurice kissed the firm white of her bended neck quickly. He felt the grip of her hand upon his shoulders suddenly tighten, then relax again, while she turned slowly back to him. The glimmer of reproach in her eyes told that she had been wounded. He had known that she would be; but he felt now only that he had taken an extreme and impossible risk.

"I don't think that's much of a reason," said Dennis, sitting on the table edge and leaning sideways against the wall. "I'm even prepared to set out and support an argument that the extremes of beauty are of necessity



evil and unlucky. I disapprove of the desire to let him escape the consequences of his sin." He looked steadily out of the window while he spoke.

Maurice held Anne the more firmly while he looked over her shoulder at Dennis. "Oh, don't worry. I'm perfectly prepared to accept the consequences." A cold detachment as of final resolution supported his voice; but he was conscious that he was acting, terribly acting. He held Anne tighter, and he would have hurt her, had not some physical barrier to his bodily control been fixed. "After all, a little more evil wouldn't matter very much to me. I've had enough not to feel the last straw. I've felt it already—and those that come after . . . well, I won't cry about them."

He knew that he was acting, and yet something of himself, serious and true, crept in. He realised distinctly that he had no hold of himself, and a strange thought came into his mind. "This is how people are at the crisis of their lives." The thought held him fast by a plain conviction. He felt that it had taken all his responsibility for himself away. Anne disengaged herself from him, taking his hand in hers and putting it away from her body, and her action was sharp with the inevitability of a dream.

"You take me too seriously," said Dennis.

"I can't." Maurice was speaking indelible lines. "The thing is serious. Even if it's only flowers, you can't ever tell how much of yourself is going into them. At a certain time I wanted to go out and cut may. I didn't think about it. There was a may-bush in front of my eyes and I had to go. You can't say I take it too seriously."

Anne bent over the bowl. Her back was turned to Maurice. His eyes were fixed upon her hands, which clenched the table edge so that he thought they might crush it. Dennis was watching him curiously.

"Things are serious. I know it. I don't take things seriously. They come to me serious. God only knows what they mean. That bowl of flowers is significant. Signifi-

cant of what I don't know. Anne said it was unlucky. Yes . . ." He held himself again. A moment of calculation came like a clear space in a stormy sky. "But that's only words. All I know is that there is meaning—and all I know about that meaning is that it's not just unluckiness. It would make life too simple . . . wouldn't it, Anne?"

He had struck at her. She turned round as she was struck and looked at him without a word. Deliberately, he moved his eyes from hers, and looked at Dennis's leg that swung regularly to and fro from the table edge. Half it fascinated him, half he insisted on being fascinated by it. Anne was leaning against the table, with her shoulders hunched up about her neck, and the palms of her hands pressed hard on the table behind her. Dennis still looked at Maurice curiously. They were both looking at him, he knew; he called every fibre and nerve in his body to aid him, to keep his eyes steady fixed on Dennis's swinging leg. If he stopped it. . . . Else he would go on looking and looking at it for ever. Slowly it stopped, slowly swinging to rest. He felt that he had won, he did not know what he had won.

"I'm a bloody fool," he said, and dropped like a dead lump into a chair beside him, with his eyes closed.

Instantly he opened them. Anne was moving towards the stairway.

"Where are you going to, Anne?"

"To my room."

Maurice was half-way out of his chair to follow her. As she disappeared through the door, he moved forward suddenly, then sank back in his chair, all his effort spent.

He looked with a weary, half-apologetic curiosity at Dennis, who was on the table, swinging his leg again.

"What the hell," said Dennis with a coolness that gave his explosive words a queer quality, "do you want to do that for?"

Maurice smiled feebly. He pulled himself up out of his

chair, and went to the bowl. Carefully he looked over the blossom and buds and chose a small piece. "I may as well have a buttonhole . . . after that," he said, and he fixed it with nervous fingers in his coat.

A few moments passed in silence between him and Dennis, while an anxiety became imperious within him. Then he went quickly upstairs and tapped at Anne's door. "Anne," he whispered, while he plucked at the blossom in his coat and threw it away from him. "Anne." Quietly, as it were performing a duty, neither painful nor desirable, she admitted him.

He leant back on the door, which shut by his weight.

"Anne, have I hurt you?"

"Too much."

Again he would act a part. Before he could begin, despair at himself, at his own awful impulse, took hold of him. It puckered a corner of his mouth into a hopeless smile. It broke into his voice as he said:

"I'm sorry."

She seemed to be thinking. But her action could not have been the outcome of thought, so gentle and so compelling was it. She took his hand that drummed its fingers listlessly against the door, and kissed him on the mouth. "We'll go down," she said.

She held his arm while they descended the narrow stairs. They were squeezed against each other; but they went together. At the bottom she said:

"We must all be famishing. . . . Why, Dennis, what are you doing there?" He was bending over the fire, which billowed with smoke and steam.

"I'm burning this cursed stuff. I hate it."

"But it couldn't do any harm now. It was very beautiful." Maurice slipped his arm from hers and ran back up the stairs.

"Oh—I thought . . . Well, it can't be helped. . . . I was left alone with it, you see."

Their eyes met. Anne said seriously, "Of course, that's



different," and they both laughed. While they laughed Maurice came down and threw the sprig from his button-hole on the fire. Nevertheless, he was a little hurt. Surely it was impossible to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"Only Dennis's absorption," said Anne. "He might have been burning a baby."

Maurice laughed too. They had a happy evening, while Dennis cynically explored his soul, and Maurice forgot so much that he was angry with himself for forgetting, when he woke to a chill certainty in the next day's dawn.

Early in the morning they rode together in Moon's wagonette into Pirford. Dennis was taciturn before the prospect of his return, and the morning air was cold. Fits of helpless apprehension passed through Maurice, and Anne had no impulse, if, indeed, she had the strength, to break through the sombre clouds that wrapped them. Dennis made a few gloomy observations concerning the work and the men awaiting him at the hospital, and depressed himself continually, until the strain was eased in a final outburst:

"I shall have to give it up."

"Well, why not?" said Anne.

"Yes, why not?" echoed Maurice, shivering.

"Oh, there're plenty of reasons. And it's not very easy after I've demolished them all. I'm covenanted to stay there at least another year."

"Can't you resign?"

"People have resigned—but it's not so easy. They don't like it."

"Of course if you mean to bother about what *they* like . . ." said Maurice.

"I don't. But it happens that I do rather like the work. I do it very well—and if I'm honest I must confess that's about the only real satisfaction that I get in life. . . . It doesn't last a moment afterwards it's true. . . . I've a

suspicion that I'm only being sentimental about myself when I want to give it up. I'm not sure."

"I think, if I were you, I'd give it up just to see what happened to myself," said Anne.

"You think I don't know?"

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "If you do, then don't dream of giving it up. It couldn't be worth while."

"No, that's right."

"Do *you* think you know what you'll do?"

"No . . . but I shall to-night . . . and to-morrow morning I shan't."

"Well, what does it matter?"

"But it does."

"How can it? You can let the outside of yourself choose what it likes, but it won't be a choice. As a matter of fact, even the outside won't choose. All *you* have to do is to wait, till something bigger than you chooses for you. But I think you'd do well to wait until you really chose something yourself. It might be a novel experience."

Anne was impatient with him, and she allowed him to feel something of her impatience. She began to dislike the importunity with which he displayed himself to her. And annoyed that she should be called upon to suffer his reactions. Dennis realised it.

"I don't see why I should plague you with my minor afflictions!"

"You mustn't. It's an insult, rather subtle, but still an insult. You're really giving me toys to play with when I'm too old for toys. If you want to keep me quiet, you mustn't say so obviously—and in any case it's unnecessary. If you're wanting to give me something—then I think I'm worth something real."

Anne leant across to Maurice, who sat looking forward along the road, almost oblivious to their talk. She placed her hand upon his knee. He looked round sharply. She said nothing, but smiled at him, and he smiled in return absently, as though his attention was set elsewhere. He

bent towards her and touched her knee, almost perfunctorily. Nevertheless, there was love in his gesture, but very soon he turned back to look at the road.

"There he is." He began to wave violently. "It's Dixon. We can get the letters. Pull up for Dixon, please, Moon."

Maurice exchanged greetings with the little grey-haired postman and took the letters. "There's this for Mrs. Cradock"—Dixon spoke interrogatively and held out a long blue envelope—"but addressed care of you, Mr. Temple, sir." The wonderful precision of the postman's speech always amused Maurice; and his amusement saved him from all confusion.

"Yes, that's all right."

"I thank you, sir. A good morning to you, madam. . . ." He doffed his cap and trudged on.

Maurice glanced at his letter while he handed Anne hers. "Bills," he said, assuming a carelessness in which neither Anne nor Dennis, nor he himself had any confidence, and stuffing his letters away. He watched Anne opening her long envelope. She gratified his decorous curiosity immediately, putting the letter in his lap. It was a sedate and gentlemanly intimation that the Paulograd Railway Company, being debarred by the rules of their constitution from declaring a higher dividend than 7 % (which, as they courteously reminded their esteemed shareholder, they had paid in full since the inception of the company), had decided to grant each holder of stock a bonus of 10 % of his holding in stock; and that Mrs. Cradock's portion was £300, which the London agents of the company signified their willingness to realise at the market rate of £105 7s. 6d. per £100 stock.

"Well, that's all right," said Maurice. Dubiety was mingled with his delight when he looked at her. She seemed indifferent to her good fortune, and to be watching only for his pleasure. But he was not wholly pleased. Though he knew he shared it, the thought that it had not



been his own made him envious. He tried to suppress the foolish feeling, but his remark proved him to have been hardly successful.

"It's an enormous lot of money," he said.

"Show it to Dennis. Aren't you pleased?"

"Of course. Aren't you?"

With her eyes alone she expressed her hesitation to pronounce.

"Very handsome of Mr. Kuraganoff, Chairman," said Dennis.

"Three hundred and fifteen—no, sixteen pounds," said Maurice at the end of a meditative silence, and whistled.

"It will pay those wretched bills of yours."

"The odd sixteen would be enough for that—and why should you? At least they belong to *my* past."

Anne felt quite cold about the money. She tapped her toes on the floor of the wagonette to warm them, and tapped them viciously. The thought that the money should have seemed God-given had everything been right made her miserable. The sunshine that would have turned the gold into drops of fire was denied her. She decided that the age of sunshine was for her ever past, and she composed herself to a resolute acceptance of life as it is. For all that, she knew that something was dancing and tingling in her. To clinch herself she said:

"I think it would have been as well if we'd let that letter go home."

"We're rather early," said Dennis, looking at his watch. They were driving up the level road to the station. "Twenty minutes to spare." They drew up at the crossing. "A quarter of an hour when we get there."

They walked up and down the platform together.

"I'm sorry you're going, Dennis," said Maurice. "When will you come again?"

"I don't know. When I come back from Sheffield—that's three weeks ahead."

"Three weeks," repeated Maurice.

Anne had stayed behind to look at the papers on the bookstall. When she came up with them again, Maurice said :

“Dennis says he won’t be down again for three weeks.” The sound of the train rumbling over the long wooden bridge broke in upon them. They turned to look, and satisfied that the train was in sight, turned back to talk for the final seconds.

“Three weeks ? ” said Anne. “I don’t expect we shall be here then.”

“Why not ? ” said Maurice.

“I’ve made up my mind that the best thing to do with some of that money is for us to have a real holiday abroad,” said Anne to Dennis.

“A kind of honeymoon,” said he.

The train burst riotously into the station. Anne shrank instinctively back from the wind and the noise, swinging sideways from the train, and drawing her head back behind the shelter of her upraised muff. She could not speak above the tumult. Dennis looked at her as he caught hold of the door handle. Behind her muff he saw her make a little bow of assent and smile. . . . “Yes, a kind of honeymoon,” it said. She stood still where she was while Maurice spoke his regret, which was keen, again.

“Well, that’s a surprise,” said Maurice. “I don’t believe she’s serious.” He looked back as though with the thought of finding her in some palpably non-serious attitude. The train began to move. Dennis put out his head once and waved. Anne seemed to be saying, “Yes, a kind of honeymoon.”

## CHAPTER XVI

WHILE they were walking in the town after Dennis had gone Anne decided there was no occasion for a piano. She hesitated in front of the big shop in the High Street, and suddenly withdrew her foot from the step, taking Maurice's arm to lead him away.

"No, I don't want one yet," she said.

Maurice felt an unaccountable and unreasonable anger.

"But why not?" he asked.

"It'd be silly. We are going away so soon. It would only be a waste of money to hire a piano which I can't use."

"So you really have decided to go?"

"Yes. Haven't you?" Her glance conveyed that she had spoken his mind for him.

"I suppose so. . . . But when are we going and where?"

"When! As soon as this business of the shares is finished. It takes some time, not long, but some time. Where! well, that'll give us something to talk about till then."

"But why not have the piano?" he insisted. In a way that he could not have defined, nor wanted to define, the piano had become all-important. "Even if we were away two months it wouldn't cost more than thirty shillings—a couple of pounds at most. It's not as though it were really losing money. I'd pay for it myself."

Her purpose was serious and definite, but she spoke gaily.

"You don't want to force a piano upon me, when I say I don't want it? Or do you intend to learn on it yourself?"

He did not accord with her gaiety; he was serious too, and impotent to suppress his seriousness.



"If you say that, of course . . ."

"But I do say it. I have said it."

"You really mean it?"

"Of course. What are you looking so determined about? I don't want the piano. That's over."

"Yes, that's over."

"Why, you speak as though you had committed suicide!" He did not believe in her nonchalance. He was convinced that she knew the piano was important. Also he knew that she was justified, but that knowledge smouldered without bursting into flame, depressing him into a moody, dishonest hostility. He lied to her though he was certain that she would not believe him; he lied, because he was certain she would not believe him. He would let her feel, but would not let her know what was passing inside him.

"You see I'm angry with myself for having forgotten about it on Saturday. That's really the matter. If you got one now I shouldn't worry so much. If you don't I shall always be accusing myself, being miserable, because I forgot about the piano."

"But it was my fault more than yours. There wasn't anything to forgive, but I forgave completely, long before you ever came back with Dennis on Saturday. You mustn't be angry with yourself for that. It's too ridiculous, really. Believe me, I haven't given it a thought since. No, it's no kind of an excuse for forcing a piano upon me, none at all."

"I suppose it isn't," he said moodily.

They walked about the town, after Anne had visited a few shops. Moon was not starting back until eleven o'clock. Idly they wandered under the old archway and along the Dean's yard, enclosed by sedate and delightful houses, glistening black doors in a setting of reddled brick, into the cloisters, cool with broken vistas of a fountained lawn.

"How did you like Dennis, while he was here?" asked Anne.

"I'm sorry he's gone back. . . . Did you like him ? "

"Sometimes very much—sometimes not at all."

"He thinks an awful lot of you."

"Yes ! " Anne was hardly interested in that. "I like him for his moments," she went on. "I'm too old to accept him altogether."

"You think that's what I do ? "

"Yes . . . why not ? Even in his worst moments there's something quite his own, if not quite himself—I mean he's individual enough to be taken in the lump. Only I haven't enough energy to respond to his demands—perhaps not enough goodwill—I can't for ever be running false tracks with him after himself."

Maurice looked enquiringly at her.

"He knows they're false before he begins. . . . He knows perfectly well that he starts with a sentimental conception of himself. . . . There's no harm in that, but I don't see why he should expect me to accept it too . . . and then he wants me to sympathise with his reactions against his own sentimentality. . . . No, I lose patience altogether with that. I told him so this morning."

"But surely, he can't help it ? "

"I'm sure he can. . . . I know he won't try to drag me into it again. It's only a kind of cruelty. He wants to punish everybody for his own sins ; so he appeals to your sympathy, and then when it really is excited and you again giving him all you have, he tells you point-blank that it's not himself after all that you're getting concerned about. No, I'm too old for that now."

"But you do like him ? . . . I'd hate to feel that you didn't. He was the only friend I had."

"I like him immensely, and always have."

"Did you enjoy that walk together ? "

She thought and said, "Yes, he had some of his better moments then."

"What did you talk about ? . . . I often wonder what he says to other people."

"He asked me why I went away with you."

"Yes." Maurice felt again a calm, almost an indifference, in Anne, as though she had decided, and her decision had taken all urgent meaning from the past. That was impossible for him, but he tried to assume the manner.

"And what did you say?"

"I said I came because I thought that you needed me." Though he desired to ponder what she said and kept silence to do so, he could not. Strangely, his mind seemed to be set at a different angle, and he could not adjust it. Her words fell, as it were, with but half their significance achieved. But he felt that she was not reluctant to answer his questions. Nor was she eager.

"What did he say to that? . . . or was he satisfied?" The latter question was an instinctive attempt to trap her into silence. He hastened to cover it. "No—he wouldn't have been satisfied, anyhow."

"He asked whether I thought that you needed *me*—the whole of me, that is, and I said 'No.'"

"Did you really mean that?"

"Yes."

Maurice stood still and stared at the fountain. The springing water seemed to poise immobile.

They turned round to walk the length of the cloister again. Maurice had saved himself from fully realising her word. In the shell of his mind he began to establish a case for his righteous resentment. That Anne had said he did not need the whole of her was not a revelation of his shortcomings, but a confession that she had been the first to fail. If she could say that about their love—of course it was not true—how could she love him? Love, why the very essence of it was that each should see perfection in the other. He saw her perfection and loved her. She saw, she imagined that she could see his imperfection, and she couldn't love him, not really. . . . But for all this clamorous rhetoric of his outer mind, which he dared not allow to



pass into speech, there was another argument being held and other conclusions reached, with no encouragement of his, in the inner chambers.

There Anne's word was felt for truth. There it was said that he saw Anne's perfection and rebelled against it, if he did not hate her for it; that Anne saw his imperfection and yet loved him; that he was conscious of his imperfection, yet resented a love that was conscious of it.

The two arguments spun on together, until a cold depression descended upon him and drove the artificialities of his outer mind to the winds. The inner thought remained, hard and inevitable. He submitted, simply because he had no more the force to repel or repress it. Therefore it carried no consequences and set moving no reactions. At the same time he felt its truth, and did not feel at all. A chill, grey mist enwrapped him, and in him there was only a vague desire to do nothing more, but to be borne along by the impact of outward things.

Yet he was keenly sensible of his silence while he sat in the cart opposite Anne on the way homeward. He must explain somehow. Because he never even conceived that he might confess the truth, he was naively surprised and as pleased as he could be then, that his words were so nearly true.

"I feel dead, absolutely tired out. . . . It's the reaction after yesterday . . . and the day before," he added, remembering that yesterday had its past.

"It's terrible," she said. . . . "I know what it's like." She looked at him with love so evident that he was almost comforted. For a second he thought that she had really believed him. He dismissed the thought, rather it was driven out by another, that she had read her meaning into his words and believed that. "The reaction after yesterday." He wondered how much she knew—everything. Not everything. . . . He hugged the memory of the letter in his pocket, though he knew that her knowledge might be complete, was complete, without any suspicion of a letter.

She could deduce a letter, he suddenly thought, from his confession on Saturday night. He began to be angry with his foolishness; but immediately he sank back into the lethargy from which he had waked.

"Aren't you cold, Anne?" he said. She shook her head. "I am, terribly," he said, and shivered involuntarily as one who wakes into a cold room. Cold and lukewarm ripples passed over his body like puffs of wind on a pool. He shivered again, violently.

"It can't be far to go now," said Anne. . . . "You really need a change."

The steady love that rang unmistakably in her words bewildered him. If it had not been so plain, he could have been certain that she was tormenting him deliberately. "Need a change." But Anne couldn't be consciously cruel to him, and for unconscious cruelty she knew too much. He hugged the thought of the letter; that was a secret of his own, at least. Yet in itself he hated the letter; it was potent with tortures for him. Only against Anne was it a thing of his own and positive. "You really need a change." The memory of her words revolted against his thoughts. Their sound was a gentle music lingering like the note of bells, rung so far away that one may not discern whether they or his fancy is playing. "You really do need a change." It was the note of conviction. Words so spoken were true, whatever they might mean. Perhaps he did need a change.

Then he had a vision of a new-found self, new-born from the womb of the world, radiant in sunny lands, and careless. His brain played him a familiar trick over that culminating word. He hesitated for a hair's breadth of time to wonder what "careless" really meant, and he waited too long. The word split up into fantastic syllables, united again into serpentine and unintelligible lines. It passed from emptily simple into the kabbala of the universe and back again; and when he held it, he held only eight signs carved in indecipherable stone. . . . Then returned a vision of him-

self moving freely over hills through olive woods, scrambling down a sheer path to a beach, launched in a wonderful white boat, and smiling in his body, responsive to all created things. He plunged eagerly into the sunshine without a pause to laugh at his own romanticism. The God-given antidote poured through his veins. He was there. The blue bay, the white boat, the olive woods that clung black on to the cliff-edge, the little house swung in air half-way down the cliff, the golden beach, the amazing winds, and the radiance of the sun . . .

"Anne," through his voice, she heard the note of guilty, shamefaced, boyish laughter. "Anne . . . I am glad we're going abroad." He sat back and looked at her with an unsteady smile, rejoicing in the light that came instantly to her eyes. Then he looked from right to left, forward along the homeroad and behind, for he was ashamed that she should see the waves of his unconquerable laughter, rippling softly and incessantly through him to a final splash on the shore which he struggled so stoutly to deny to them. So they reached home.

Against the strong rock of that ecstatic triumph the tides of reaction were powerless. He was very happy, and talked to her for many hours every day of the places they would visit. Paris, of course. You had to go there to get anywhere, but they would only stay there a couple of days. In any case they knew Paris. They compared recollections of travel, above all recollections of Paris, whereto Maurice's travel had been chiefly confined. Anne was not unprepared to find that he knew a different Paris from hers; but he was amazed that she knew so little of his, and he remained rather doubtful whether hers truly existed. A boat on the Rhône from Lyons, the Mediterranean coast from Pyrenees to Alps. Corsica—he gave her his vision, and generously made a place for her upon the golden beach, which he set in the island—Siena, Assisi—he even quoted



Propertius—Sicily, the Adriatic, Spalato—he reminded her that there was a war or something at Durazzo—Corfu, and why not Greece and the Islands?

“Why not?” said Anne. She, too, was wonderfully happy, but controlled and determined, as when she insisted against his indignant protests, on giving him one hundred of the unexpected pounds.

“It’s better that you should not have to ask me for money,” she said. “It is not fair to you.” Grudgingly, he gave way. Again she insisted that he should order new clothes, when they went together to cash the broker’s cheque in London.

“I don’t want them. Besides, they’ll take a week.”

“Not if you insist on having them in four days. . . . I think you have to live in my manner, not I in yours. It’s only a question of age.”

Inside the shop he was pleased to be buying clothes. It was easy and delightful. Moreover, it was Anne who insisted with the tailor.

“But what a lot of money we’re spending,” he said, half in remonstrance, half in admiration, when they emerged into the street.

“There are times,” she replied, “when spending is one of the great joys, one of the real ones. It sounds cheap, I know; but it’s true.”

Maurice was content with that, on the strength of his own new experience. It was, indeed, very new to him, and, when they reached home, after four days in a quiet hotel, he pulled out his pocket-book in his own little room in order to bring himself to earth again. He read the letter and was something moved by it, but so little that he said to himself, “It’s amazing how soon I can be dead to a thing like this.” He made up his mind to burn the letter, but when he had gone circuitously to reach the kitchen fire, he replaced it in his case. “After all, it’s a relic,” he said.

They decided to start in the three days’ time. A letter

from Dennis, lecturing in Sheffield, enquiring curiously whether the plan still held, and asking that, if it did, they would send him some account of the places they were going to and the time they would be there, because he had an idea that Sheffield had finished him, compelled them to fix a day for his information. Anne fixed on Sunday, "because," she said, "travelling in England on Sunday is so terrible that there's a double thrill in travelling away from it." Maurice replied to Dennis accordingly that they were starting for Paris on Sunday, from whence they would go on to Lyons and the Rhône boat; but they did not know how long they were to stay in Paris.

"We were only going to stay a couple of days," he wrote, "but Anne has since been rather full of the idea that she would like to stay there longer, and know my Paris. I suppose that means that I shall have to know hers. And that may take a good deal longer than two days. In any case, I'll write to you immediately we get there, and certainly tell you when we are going away. We are both very excited."

He looked across the table with the end of the pen in his mouth before addressing the envelope. "If we're going to have a fortnight in Paris," he said, "and do the same right up to Durazzo, Greece and the Islands, it's a good job you didn't get that piano, Anne." He coloured as he said it, and to cover himself he said:

"Durazzo, Greece and the Islands. . . It would be worth while being a porter to have that to shout on a platform, don't you think?"

"I do," said Anne.

END OF PART I

## PART II

### CHAPTER I

"ANNE, it was last Monday week that we came over here, wasn't it? Yes, it must have been. I can remember the days all right, if I think about them. . . . It's hard to think about them properly, because they haven't been days at all—weeks or seasons. . . . I mean it's nonsense to say that we've only been here a week and a day. One could do that anywhere, be a week and a day in Sheffield even. . . . I don't know what has come over me, perhaps it's only laziness, but I feel that I couldn't move on, not even to Lyons, until this comes to an end naturally. . . . Everything's so clear, so certain. It's probably only the air, after all. Look at those men down there."

They were sitting together on the balcony of a small and admirable hotel close to the Opera, at ten o'clock in the morning. Maurice was pointing to a French workman in a blouse, with black moustaches, who was clattering a *pas seul* in the middle of the cobbled street below. Another blue-bloused workman, and a woman, bareheaded, wrapped in a shawl, and approaching fatness, stood still on the pavement to laugh at their friend. In a moment he stopped his dance abruptly, ran, holding his hands in his pockets, with little steps back to his companions.

The three went down the street together, the two men singing, arm in arm, and the woman pausing every now and then that some of her laughter might bubble up, as it were, to the surface of her body.

"I feel rather like that," said Maurice, "or if I don't



feel exactly like that, I can understand it perfectly well. I always had a pretty good opinion of Paris ; but I never gave it credit for this kind of thing."

"I'm so glad," said Anne. "I don't think that I would have a single thing altered—nothing that's happened since we crossed in the boat. It's all been new even to me. I could hardly believe it was Versailles yesterday—and I was once there at school. . . . But only one term."

"What wonderful stuff that coat is made of. I can't help looking at it." Maurice took hold of Anne's sleeve, and felt the pearly grey cloth. It was very soft, and it glinted with something of silver in the morning sun. "That's the tenth time I've done that this morning, at least. . . . For Heaven's sake tell me to leave off."

"Why? Every time you do it, you justify my own extravagance. Say a louis a time; and you have to admire it once more at least to make 275 francs. You know that's what I paid for it, don't you?"

"To me it seems ridiculously cheap. . . . No, really, I mean it. I know I should never be able to spend eleven pounds on a coat and skirt in England. But here it's different, quite different."

Anne stood up, thrusting her hands into the deep pockets of the long coat. A collar of brilliant blue silk curved up almost to her ears.

"You do look beautiful."

"I feel beautiful."

"Yes, of course, but that must be a glorious feeling." He leant against the balcony rail. "Do you know I've thought about that several times during the week, what it must be like for a woman to know she is beautiful. . . . This is the first time in my life I ever realised what a beautiful woman is." He spoke as confessing. "Of course I've seen them—but I've never been really near one before. While we were in the country I didn't notice you. I believe it's because you've been different since we came over here. But, to be intimate with a beautiful woman . . . it's really

a new world to me. To realise it you have to study it. Until now I always thought that women just *were* beautiful. I mean that beauty was a sort of accident. Now I have an idea that to be beautiful for a woman could be—perhaps it ought to be—the end.”

“And I’ve taught you that! I hope I haven’t turned you into a voluptuary. . . . I can’t help it. You make me very happy when you say that. Even it makes me feel more beautiful still.” Anne smiled at him. “That’s mutual honesty at any rate.”

“I don’t know whether I’m degenerating or not, but do you know, Anne, at that place where we had dinner last night, I felt a real thrill because everything was so exquisite and you were so wonderful. It was quite new to me, I felt it was quite right for everything to be so expensive—it was expensive, wasn’t it?—I’m sure I shouldn’t have been half so excited or happy if things had been the proper price.”

“That’s my Paris doing its work. . . . But I wonder if you have the same feeling as I have. I’ve had it before here, but then it was only a shadow of what it is now. . . . It feels to me so splendidly dangerous. As if it might suddenly all disappear like a feast in the *Arabian Nights*, I always have somebody at my elbow saying, ‘It never can happen again’; that makes me so aware of everything. I think that I never can forget the smallest thing that happens. It’s not that I’m sad—but my nerves are all alert and noticing, simply because they will never have the chance to notice these things again.”

Maurice looked anxious. “But do you really believe it never can happen again?”

“It’s not a case of believing. I don’t believe and I don’t think. It’s just a feeling that’s always there whether I want it or not. I don’t even go so far as not to want it. It gives everything a quality; it makes them unforgettable. . . . And, after all, why should things happen again? They might be dull the second time. No . . . I love the things

that come to me with 'never again' written on their foreheads. What's more, I think they're the only real ones."

"Perhaps you're right. I don't know. I shouldn't dare to think—to feel—that. It makes me so terribly miserable. Even your talking about it has made me sad."

"I shouldn't wonder if that's why you don't feel it . . . because you don't allow yourself to. But tell me, honestly, isn't half your feeling that this last week's been so wonderful, just the same as mine?"

"I dare say it is, but I can't believe it. I can't afford to. No. . . . I don't believe it's really true either. . . ."

"Well, it doesn't matter, one way or the other."

"I think it does."

"Why? Things never do happen again. The reason why I feel it so much now is that this has been—is very wonderful. And if it ever comes to regretting that things won't come again, it will be this and things like this I shall regret. But there's nothing terrible in that. How many people have something that they can truly regret, something so fine that even in regretting it, they are happy? No, I shan't be one of a crowd, nor you. But really it doesn't matter. You'll risk its happening again all the same, and it won't come again. It may be better or it may be worse, but it won't be the same. I took the risk in coming back to my Paris—and this is what came of it. You're going to take the risk when you begin to show me yours. . . . Please don't look sad. It's only one of my philosophies. I'm sure it's very crude and feminine."

"I'm sure it isn't. But it frightens me, that's all. I can't understand why it doesn't frighten you."

She seemed to ponder for a little while. "I wonder why. I have a vague idea that it might be the cynicism of age. After all, I am old—very old. And I can see that it might sound cynical to you. But that can't be the reason. I can't remember when I didn't have the same idea. It's part of my temperament. Does it make me happier or



sadder, I wonder ? . . . Happier, I'm sure. I seem to taste everything. . . .

"But what about your friend—Ramsay, wasn't it? You said we were going to see him, and have tea this afternoon. Is that decided, or have you changed your plans? I'm under your management from to-day on, remember."

"Yes, we'll do that, but I ought to have written to him. I'll send a *bleu*. It'll get to him before one o'clock, and I must see about the room for Dennis. I wish he'd been sensible and told us exactly when he's coming. Even if he came immediately he sent the telegram, he wouldn't arrive till to-morrow morning. At least I don't think so." Maurice pulled the crumpled telegram from his pocket, read once more, "Sheffield's done it. Coming Paris," and laughed. "It's Dennis all over. He sent that at twenty-past eight this morning. I bet he was awake all night trying to decide. Even if he sent it on his way to the station he wouldn't be in time for the afternoon boat. He might, though. Oh, I don't know. I'd better go to see about a room now to be quite safe. He'll have to pay if he comes late. And I'll write to Bill. . . . That's Ramsay. Everybody calls him 'Bill.'"

He went back into the sitting-room and sat down at a little table to write. The smooth polished table, the fair note-paper discreetly stamped "Hôtel d'Avignon," the clean blotter, the shining inkstand, all decorously invited his attention and combined to make the writing of notes a pleasure. He could have written to all his friends, nearly all forgotten friends, for the mere luxury of it. The sense that life was perfectly modulated in that room laid hold of him again, and he glanced backward through the long window at Anne, who leant over the balcony and watched the street below. He could not restrain his feeling of pride that he was with her in the room. The room was hers, even if it was common to both of them. It was her hotel and the room her choosing. He was not yet free from his surprising discovery that a hotel could be so quietly perfect

that Anne seemed to be settled in her own possessions while she stayed there. And he himself, he thought, had fitted in with the surroundings. No, it was not snobbishness that made him happy to be with her in a place like that. That was how life ought to be lived, with some exquisite refinement in its very commonplaces. It made you strong to go your own way. He did not worry about anything any more. Instead, he was perfectly content to follow in Anne's train and enjoy. If you always approached life from that angle it would always be wonderful. That was the real secret of last week.

The thoughts that wreathed about him were not thoughts at all, for they never formed. He was too thoroughly in tune with his regimen to feel more than a pervading contentment. There was nothing to irritate and stimulate him into thinking. He looked at Anne again. She had turned and was looking into the room at him, leaning back with her elbows rested upon the balcony rail; and he, involuntarily smiling, got up and went towards her.

"Anne, I don't think I'll send a note to Ramsay. I'll go myself. If he's not in, I can find somebody else. Besides, it'll be good to walk over the river, through the Luxembourg. Won't you come?"

"No, it's better you should go alone—I'll stay out here and read a book. You'll be back soon? By one o'clock?"

"Easily. . . . It's not very far. Or distances don't seem to be very much here."

"Well, I'll wait for you here. . . . Are you sure you want me to go with you this afternoon? I'd be quite happy by myself if you'd rather go alone."

"But I want you to come. It was arranged. Besides, you'll like Ramsay. I only wanted to run over and see if he was in."

"Very well, but won't you have lunch together?"

"I don't suppose so. . . . I'll come back for it."

"I won't expect you, anyhow, so that you're free."

"Au revoir."

He went into the bedroom and put on a coat and hat. He was very pleased that Anne had made him buy clothes before he came away, and now he was gently elated, that his grey coat looked so neatly bright and fitted him so well. He went back to say good-bye again, really to be inspected by Anne. She did not fail him.

"I think you look very well in that coat, very well indeed," she shifted it a little on his shoulders.

Happily conscious of well-being he went down the stairs. His conversation with the lady at the bureau about the room for Dennis went more easily than a like conversation had ever gone before, and in French of uncommon fluency. He surprised himself by arranging that should Dennis not arrive until the morrow he would not be called upon to pay for the night, and the lady surprised him by acquiescing without the least protestation. He walked quickly into the Tuileries.

A clear blue sunlight shone on the pink marble of the arc Carrousel. A fresh spring breeze leapt up and down upon the cobbles of the roadway. The busy motor buses emerged swiftly from the arches and buzzed like noisy summer beetles round the curve. Anne's words—"It never can happen again"—came into his mind. He replied to them by wondering why it should ever stop. Even while he agreed to the vague suggestion that things had to have an end, he could see none. As for money, there was Anne's. Besides, he could surely earn something, sooner or later. He might really sit down and write a book. That was an uncanny way of looking at things, that of Anne's. He did not have long to shudder over it, for he immediately began to think of Ramsay. It was delightful to be going, unexpected, to his studio. Ramsay would be so glad to see him. He always was glad. Maurice began to anticipate his welcome. Ramsay would smile, with a trace of bewilderment, then grip his hand: "Hullo, Temple! I'm shaving," although the lather on his face was so obvious. He would walk about the room for half an hour then, continually



stroking his shining face with his brush, never wholly forgetting that he was engaged in his toilet, never quite remembering.

The sudden fancy that Ramsay might not be at home spurred him to run. He was up the stairs and ringing at the bell before he could be rid of the fancy. Immediately he heard some steps within, and was once more happy with expectation.

The door opened. "Hullo, Temple!" Maurice could hardly believe it was he, so perturbed had he been. The dressing-gown, the smooth black hair, the dark eyes that kindled when they looked at him, the tall white sunny studio behind, they were more like the sudden realisation of a dream than a steady reality. He almost gasped with delight.

"I'm just up," said Ramsay.

"I knew you'd say that."

Ramsay looked at him curiously, and a smile began to light in his eyes. "I always seem to be just getting up. Is that it?"

Maurice nodded. "I couldn't help wondering as I came along what you'd say. I decided that would be some of it. I thought you'd be shaving, too."

"Only just beginning." He pointed to his brush and water standing ready in a corner. "What on earth is the time?"

"About half-past eleven. Perhaps a bit more than that. Say a quarter to twelve."

"Is that so?" Ramsay looked absorbed, as though he were trying to translate the information into a language of his own. "Isn't it a wonderful day?" He walked over to his big windows and drew the light curtains wide. The sunlight poured in, broken into a thousand tiny jets of cool light by the leaves of a tree outside, newly unfolded. They stood together by the window and looked out upon the yard below. A cart squatted lazily upon its beam end, like a dog on its haunches.

"How have you been getting on, Temple, since I saw you in London? . . . Why, it must be a couple of years and more since you were here, isn't it? It's not changed so very much. What have you been doing? Someone—I forgot who—told me you were writing on some paper or other."

"I was, but I've given it up now—for the present at any rate. I'm on a holiday. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, the same thing. You won't remember any of this stuff. Nearly all of it's new. At least there's none of it more than two years old. You see they've just made up their minds to take a fancy to me as I was ten years ago. I've sold all the stuff that I thought was studio lumber. It's a pity I haven't got any more of it. But when they get to the point of asking me why I don't still paint the same way as I did ten years ago, it's rather annoying—yes, rather annoying. . . .

"Still, I've made more money out of my old pictures in a year than I have out of my new ones in five. But then, it's only money. If someone came and gave me two hundred for this"—he pointed to a large canvas, an ample design of dancing men and women—"it wouldn't be only money. That's too much to expect though. . . . Will you have some tea? It's my breakfast making that noise in there." A kettle lid slammed and clattered behind a door.

They sat down on a sofa beside a low table. Ramsay made tea with a deliberate care, swathing the blue teapot round with a cloth. The tea stood like clear amber in the cup. Maurice watched the smooth black hair on his head as he bent down to cut bread, and thought that Ramsay, too, was perfect, the perfect accomplisher of his purposes.

"How long are you stopping here?"

"I'm not sure. We were going on to Lyons at the end of the week, but we may be longer now."

Ramsay went on cutting. "You'd best stay awhile, while the weather is like this. It's really possible to live in a Paris spring, I feel alive. I could do anything—and

eat anything. But I stick to porridge and brown bread in the morning. It's a habit now."

Maurice had time to bring himself to explain the "we."  
"You didn't know I was married, did you? My wife's over here with me."

"Is that so?" Ramsay gave him again the look of half-comprehension. "How long have you been married?"

"Only a month."

Ramsay nodded. "Don't believe in it myself. It would interfere with me. . . . But why didn't you bring Madame along with you?"

"I wanted to bring her to tea this afternoon."

"That's a *good* idea. I'm not working to-day. There's Miss Etheredge coming this afternoon. But that won't matter. You know her."

"All the better," said Maurice.

"Do I know your wife? Who was she?"

"No, I don't think you do. She was a Mrs. Cradock."

Again Ramsay accepted the information in the same way. He seemed to be attending with one self, while the other went on being Ramsay.

"Not the wife of the writer-fellow?"

"I dare say. Cradock's a dramatic critic."

"Gave him a real drama to criticise, did you? Quite a *good* idea. . . . Do you know, for a moment I thought you had married that girl you used to be about with here. You remember that night I met you at that little restaurant. . . . By the way, what's become of that young chap—French, wasn't it—who was with you then?"

"I haven't heard of him for years—only once since we were here together. He was somewhere out in Russia, when I had a letter from him."

"Nice chap."

"He's a good sort," Maurice agreed.

"I'm glad you didn't marry that girl. What was the good? They don't expect to be married; but they're ready to take a chance when they see a soft thing. You



were a bit soft in those days, Temple. . . . And I wouldn't marry a French girl, anyhow, if I had to marry. Then you came up against a bit of real solid France, quite different from the kind of thing you have here. I was down by Bordeaux—thirty miles away—this summer. It was a good job I went for the summer and not for the people. They're just a little bit tougher than the people in a small Scotch town. No, it'd take you all your time to survive if you got wedged into that."

Maurice hesitated, then with an assumed carelessness, said: "I don't think she was that kind of girl, all the same."

"No, they never are. . . . She was a nice quiet girl though. I liked her. Do you remember when we went to the café the night I met you? I never forgot how she sat next to you, fairly weeping with toothache, while you explained Bergson to me, and I put up Bill Crookes' electrons. I'm still the same. I can go on talking about 'em for hours. I should think I spend half my life talking. It's a good thing to do when you can't work any more. Have you brought any new theories over with you? . . . What about that Italian fellow you told me about the last time you were here? I've never heard anything about him since."

"I don't know whether he has written anything more. . . . No, I haven't got any theories. I'm getting dull. . . . Things don't seem to be anything like as simple as they used to be. I envy you; you have a job and stick to it. Your life doesn't get more complicated at all events, even if it doesn't get simpler."

"Oh, I paint just as another fellow builds a steam-engine or a bridge—just because I have to. I don't know whether it makes everything easier. I suppose it is solid enough to stand on though."

"You've always got a point of view, and a pretty steady one. I haven't one at all. I used to have yours, but it didn't wear well for me."

"There's something in that. . . . But why don't you get something out of writing? It's the same kind of thing as painting, surely?"

"Perhaps, but I always stop to wonder with it's all for. If I'd got the habit of writing first and started to wonder afterwards it would have been all right. That's how you started painting, isn't it? But now I have to convince myself that there's something in it first. I haven't succeeded yet. The only thing I can see myself doing is to write a book to show that everybody else is on the wrong track. A devil of a lot of good that would be if I couldn't say which was the right one. And even if I knew the right one, I couldn't reply very much to anyone who said, 'Show us some of your stuff.'"

"But couldn't you get an idea out of these Egyptian fellows? They seem to have been pretty all right at the art business. Didn't they write anything?"

"Yes, but as far as I know it's the kind of stuff the Pyramids might have written, facts about armies and wars and gods, nothing else. It looks as though they didn't believe in literature."

"Thought it was too sentimental, altogether?"

"Something like that."

"I'm glad I didn't make a mistake and become a bloody poet."

"So am I. . . . But perhaps something'll turn up. I'll make some amazing discovery. It's not so easy, though."

"It don't cost much to start, anyway. Two penn'orth of paper and a pencil—that's enough for a masterpiece. You look at my bill for colours and canvas, and I have to have a studio—why, it costs a small fortune to set up in the trade."

"That's true. But I do believe writing's more difficult, at least harder to hit off in a straight line and go on in. . . . Lots of people find it devilishly easy, and successful. I despise 'em all, but that doesn't stop me from envying them. They nearly drive me mad with jealousy. When

I'm feeling chirpy, I say to myself that it's because I can see beyond that safely enough, but I can't see as far as the next stage. It's a rotten position to be in. . . ."

"You don't want to be a B.W. Leader, and you can't quite manage a Van Gogh—yet?"

"That's the idea. . . . But seriously—you can't get over the fact that words mean something. That's what they're for. You can't just stick them about and make a pattern with them. They have always got to mean something, and what's more they have to mean something pretty big. The time's past when you could put a middle-class man's ideas into words and make a classic by putting them in beautiful words.

"It'll always be done of course, until the year before the judgment day; but people are beginning to live by ideas. They can't be patient while somebody tickles their ears with a straw. There has to be a new idea now, you see—some sort of philosophy of life. You understand what I mean? Writing nowadays means representing living people. Poetry is always second rate, now, simply because the good people don't want to be delighted any more, or they only want to be delighted just as they want to play cricket or sail boats.

"We've got past that idea now. Now people want to be justified, *in* their life. You can't just kill them off. Battle, murder and sudden deaths—they're only accidents. What you have to prove now is that they are only accidents. You can't burke the question by offering them a share in eternal life on spec. It's not even entertaining any more. No, they want to be justified here and now. I don't mean that a writer has to justify a French politician or your picture dealer, as a politician or a picture dealer. It couldn't be done. The problem is this: stick two, three or a dozen people together, watch them, represent them so that everybody must admit that they have really justified their existence. It's not so very simple is it?"

"I'm not quite sure that I've understood. . . . It sounds



to me rather a sentimental idea. I believe you've been corrupted."

"I believe you—not that I've been corrupted, but that I'm sentimental. There are all sorts of sentimentality. It goes on evolving from kind to kind. All that a writer can do is to discover the kind of sentimentality that the next two hundred years will live by. That's all I have to show for two years of my life, since I was here last. Tomorrow I shan't believe a word of it."

"That's a comfort. . . . I don't want anybody worrying me about whether I justify myself. I'd want to knock him down."

"It's all right. I'm not a missionary. . . . But, Lord, I do envy you, seriously I do."

"What's the good? If you were a painter, you'd have done two promising studies from the life, and spent the rest of the time worrying if it was possible to beat Rembrandt at his own game."

Maurice nodded, smiling.

"I couldn't. I have to be doing something, sailing a boat, landing a fish, or punching somebody on the nose. I paint, because I can put nearly all those things into it. And you've no idea how a canvas like that takes it out of me. I might have been punching a whole street full of jaws, the way I sleep after it. . . . But you look a bit better than you used to. . . . Been eating plenty of meat?"

"I dare say. I've been in the country for the last month—in Richmond's cottage. . . ."

"That's it. . . . He's got a cottage somewhere on the South Coast, hasn't he? He said once I might use it. I might have done when I was hard up; but so long as I've got any money, I'm not going back. . . . what's he doing?"

"He's somewhere in Austria, I think. I've not heard of him, but Dennis had a letter from some queer place out there. . . . Oh, you don't know Beauchamp, do you? He's coming over here soon. You'll like him."

Ramsay nodded his head in enquiring assent. "What's he?"

"He is, at least he was, a doctor. He used to lecture at a hospital. But he says he's given it up now."

"Old man?"

"No, only a bit older than me."

"That's young to be lecturing at a hospital, isn't it?"

"I don't know. He's very clever."

"Bring him along. . . . Are you going anywhere to lunch?"

"No."

"Well, I'll get on with my dressing and we'll go somewhere—to Bourdon's." Ramsay disappeared behind a door. Maurice wandered about the room. After his words he was in a fever to be doing something of his own. The tumult of his desire was vague and without focus, re-awakened by every object that arrested him in his wandering. Everything, the white table, the lamp of turquoise blue, the great stove with its black pipe running straight like the mast of a ship to the roof against the white wall, had its order and its purpose, plainly subdued to Ramsay's will. They came to a fine point in the canvas he was painting and were dominated by it. The room was a stronghold of Ramsay's personality. Maurice felt that it was useless for him to believe, as he had believed but a second ago, that he could do something in a room like that, secluded at will, and free to be alone and to be himself. The room was not a preliminary but a result of victory.

There followed the tormenting thought that he was an absolute charlatan, empty and futile, against Ramsay's fullness, and he felt a kind of terror lest he should be detected as unworthy. But chiefly he was beset by the feverish desire himself to achieve, to maintain himself upon his achievement and approach Ramsay as an equal; and with the desire was the knowledge that he could achieve nothing having no purpose fixed. It would be enough, he thought, if he could do something that would deceive Ramsay. He

might manage that. But what might deceive Ramsay would not deceive Dennis ; and even if he could succeed against both. . . . He saw Anne sitting quietly in a chair and watching him, and he knew that she would have seen into the very first workings of his desire. No, he would have to do something himself. He knew that he could do nothing at all.

He lit a cigarette and smoked nervously. On the point of calling out to offer Ramsay a cigarette he remembered that Ramsay had given up smoking long ago, because it interfered with his work. It was a typical achievement, he thought, and went on in his journeying about the room. Waking beneath his physical impatience was a sense of moral futility.

The bell chain squeaked and the bell tinkled.

"Will you go to the door, Temple? I'm in my bath."

A tall, thin man walked past him into the room. He peered through his glasses with more indifference than curiosity, and the slight stoop of his long body strengthened the impression of indifference.

"Bill in?" he said to Maurice.

"Bathing." Maurice spoke to give the effect of easy intimacy.

"Who's that?" called Ramsay.

"Only A. S.," the tall man replied.

"Shan't be a minute. You know Wauchope, don't you, Temple?" he called. Wauchope and Maurice shook hands. Maurice knew the name well for that of a painter friend of Ramsay's of whom Ramsay had a high opinion. He was very clever. Maurice was uneasy at his reputation and his appearance and he stood still in the middle of the floor, while Wauchope stepped forward with his hat held lightly in his hands, and looked at the large half-finished picture. He drew himself back with a jerk after his scrutiny and turned to Maurice. "What do you think of that?"



Instantly Maurice decided for complete honesty. "I don't understand it."

"Huh." Wauchope's short little laugh might have been amusement or contempt. Maurice wondered whether he laughed at the picture or at himself.

"I've heard of you, haven't I, from Miss Etheredge? Had a *grande passion* here two years ago, didn't you?"

"Something of the kind." Maurice laughed not with conviction, but to save himself.

"What are you doing now?"

"Having a holiday."

"No, what are you having a holiday from?"

"Myself." Maurice had realised suddenly that he would have to fight against Wauchope. He gained a cheap breathing space, and the time to congratulate himself that it wasn't so cheap after all.

"That's sensible if you can bring it off. But what does yourself do when it's not *en vacances*?"

"Nothing. Something else tries to write a little, and earns a little money by it."

"Huh. . . . Are there as many people who write a little as there are people who paint a little?"

"Quite, I imagine; but just about the same number who make a little money by it."

"What do you write about?"

"Books mainly, all kinds of books."

"Met any good ones lately?"

"Not one."

"Huh! . . ."

Again Maurice could not tell whether it was meant in disparagement of the books or himself, and was silent.

"What are your ideas about writing? . . . . But, of course, you've let off all your theories to him, already." Wauchope nodded to Ramsay's room.

"All of 'em, I couldn't do it again."

"You have 'em at all events."

"Sometimes."

Maurice felt that he had held his own enough to be able to inspect Wauchope. He looked at him steadily. Wauchope seemed to be looking through him at a drawing which hung on the wall, and then Maurice saw a faint light in his grey eyes and a little movement on his lips, and felt that Wauchope was laughing at him. He thought back to find where he had given himself away by his words, and found no place. But he could not leave things as they were; nor could he do or say anything definite lest he should give Wauchope yet another hold upon him.

"Have you seen Miss Etheredge lately?" he asked.

"No!" Wauchope smiled. "We're rather given to avoiding each other, as a matter of fact."

"I didn't think Miss Etheredge ever troubled very much about avoiding people. She always seemed rather to seek them out the moment she thought they were avoiding her. . . . But, of course, I don't know very much about her. . . ."

"Evidently not . . . or you wouldn't confide your affections in her quite so much."

"Did I tell her so much then?"

"Quite enough for her to make a very pathetic story about it—and very interesting."

"Well, I don't see there's very much harm done."

"It's for you to say, anyhow."

Maurice was weary of the effort to put up a defence against Wauchope. He felt that even the attempted defence gave him the more completely away, and he was frightened of the man's strange uncaused hostility. He desired to placate him, and in the pause offered him a cigarette. Wauchope took it. Maurice was assiduous in lighting it for him, and waited what he would say.

Fascinated, Maurice watched him as he stood. He was holding his right arm across his body, his hat dangling from his hand. In the fingers of the other hand he held the cigarette against his lips. His elbow rested upon his right arm. The attitude was artificial, yet it was not a pose. Rather, thought Maurice, it was to deceive his company

into taking him at the obvious value of his attitude. One impression, however, was for Maurice so unusual, that it dominated all. He was sure that Wauchope was a man to fascinate and frighten women; and he uneasily suspected that he himself in Wauchope's presence was like a woman.

Wauchope swept his arm about the room. "He's an amazing man, isn't he?"

"I think so."

"Bill!" Wauchope called in a low voice that carried far.

"What is it?" answered Ramsay.

"Oh, Mr. Temple thinks you are an amazing man. . . . Quite emphatic about it."

"That's all right then," Ramsay appeared with tousled hair, leisurely dragging on a waistcoat. "Did you come round for anything in particular, A. S.?"

"I thought I'd see if you're coming to lunch."

"I was just talking about that to Temple there. We thought of going to Bourdon's. Is that all right for you?"

"Quite." Wauchope flicked the ash from his cigarette on to the floor, as one in need of a gesture.

"There was something else, though. . . . I think I'm going to clear out of this place. . . ."

"Is that so? . . . Curious kind of time to choose though. It's just begun to be tolerable again."

"Spring, you mean. . . . Yes, there's that. But it's not the place, it's the people. I'm sick to death of having second-hand ideas rammed down my throat by some fifth-rate idiot every time I go out to have a drink at night-time. If I can't have any intelligent company I'll have none at all."

"Why should you? You can have your drink by yourself. . . . But is it as bad as all that?"

"I'm damned if I can see why it doesn't upset you. You seem to revel in it. . . ."

Ramsay laughed. "I do. I enjoy it."

"You never seem to think a man's a fool until he earns his living by being one. Or do you never make up your



mind about anybody ? . . . But I can't drink by myself if I'm stuck in Paris. I get mad with loneliness when I think of everybody else drinking and talking and I'm not there. No, I'll have to take some woman and go and live in the country, where I simply can't find anybody at night."

"It sounds all right—but God pity the woman."

"What d'you mean ?" Wauchope looked as though he had been discovered in murder ; Ramsay laughed as he answered, brushing his smooth hair deliberately before the glass.

"Damn it all. What do you expect ? Stick a woman in the country, miles away from anywhere, with you when you suddenly want to drink and talk to somebody—well, it's not going to be a *bergerie* exactly, is it ? "

"No," said Wauchope. "That's true. I suppose I shall have to give up the idea of the woman."

"Why ? Some of them like it." Ramsay finally smoothed the hair down on to the bronzed nape of his neck. "You might manage a baby. Live in the open with plenty of air and plenty to eat, and you couldn't help it. Intellectual painter, simple wife, bouncing baby—it ought to be easy enough to work. Anyhow, it sounds quite the thing, don't it, Temple ? "

Something about Wauchope made him answer as though he had not been really attending to the conversation.

"What ? . . . Yes. . . . I suppose it does."

"But you've really made up your mind ? "

"Yes, I was thinking of going to-morrow. I really wanted to see if you knew of a good place."

"What sort of thing do you want—a cottage or rooms in an *auberge* ? . . . There's a place down by the Pyrenees where we went the year before last, where they've got two good rooms in the *auberge*, one quite good enough to paint in. I did a good deal there. Would that be any good ? "

"Give me the address and I'll wire."

"But what are you going to do with your studio ? You

have a woman to look after you. Are you going to take her with you ? ”

“ Why, what difference does that make ? I’ve left her here before now.”

“ I don’t mean that. I was thinking that perhaps if you cared to let it, Temple might take it for a bit. Better than letting it lie empty. Besides, it’s more a flat than a studio.”

“ But he could do it cheaper in a hotel. I’d expect him to pay rent. He could board and lodge himself for that in the *Lille*—quite well, too.”

“ But he’s got a wife, you see—and a friend of his is coming to stay with him for a bit. I thought it might be a good notion.” Ramsay finished his brushing, put on his coat, and went to rummage for his hat.

“ You’re married, are you then ? ” Wauchope turned to Maurice and whistled. “ That’s another story. . . . You’ll have some fun when you tell Miss Etheredge that.”

“ Well, she won’t have to wait long. I’m seeing her this afternoon.”

“ You know where she lives then ? ”

“ No, I’m meeting her here at tea.”

“ *Are* you though ? ” Wauchope called to Ramsay.

“ Bill, may I come to tea this afternoon ? ”

“ Of course. But won’t you be busy getting ready for this holiday of yours ? ”

“ Trying to put me off ? ”

“ Not a bit. Only Etheredge is coming.”

“ That’s just the reason why I want to. She’ll be beginning to think I’m avoiding her.”

“ Aren’t you, then ? ”

“ It all depends what you mean. I don’t like her to interfere with me, but I haven’t any objection to interfering with her.”

“ So that’s it. But she may be angry with me for not having told her. I’d better send her word. I don’t want a row here. And it’s quite a party. Mrs. Temple is coming, too.”

"Don't send. I'll not come to tea. But I don't promise not to drop in afterwards. I'd like to see the merry gathering." Wauchope glanced at Maurice. Ramsay led the way to the door. Wauchope motioned with his hand that Maurice should precede him. Irresolutely Maurice did the same. After a fraction of a second he blushed, and from his hesitation hurried out in front of Wauchope. He seemed to hear the smile of amusement at his discomfiture.

During lunch they talked but little. Maurice strove to avoid making any remarks of which Wauchope might take hold, but listened with an assumed interest to the other two, who spasmodically discussed the *auberge* at Villemain St. Marie, and the immediate decadence of any *salon* which had ever been or would ever be opened for painters who were beyond the pale of Academies. Ramsay went off the moment lunch was finished. He had business, he explained, on the other side and invited Maurice to share his cab. Wauchope saluted with an intense courtesy when Maurice took his leave.



## CHAPTER II

MEANWHILE, during the morning, Anne had been reading quietly on the balcony, more often glancing down into the street than at her book. At lunch she was surprised by a second telegram from Dennis announcing that he would arrive at the Gare du Nord at half-past three that afternoon. She read the telegram bemusedly many times as she meandered through lunch, and dimly decided that she would go to meet him. There was plenty of time to walk. She had but little to do in the way of dressing, but it took her half an hour ; so contentedly dreamy was she. Contact with the bureau at her enquiry as to which was the best, not the quickest but the best, way to get to the station, awakened her. By the time she had stepped on to the pavement she was alert to everything. A fleeting thought that she had done something ridiculous in her dressing nearly drove her back to the hotel, but she so soon succumbed to the feeling that it was quite unimportant that she hardly checked her steps.

She regulated her pace carefully, after she had crossed the Place de l'Opéra ; she chose a decision in her steps in order to avoid importunities ; she went slowly because she desired above all things to forget that she was going anywhere. Her eyes turned delightedly from people to shops. The delight of seeing was so vivid that she forgot to be impressed by the objects she saw. Gradually a staring poster asserted itself, claiming by its violent metallic red to be comprehended as well as seen. She paused naturally in front of it, long enough to read, "*L'Amour, revue en dix-neuf scènes,*" and to see that the authors and the artistes were duly recorded upon the bill in their appropriate place.

She walked on, saying mechanically to herself, "L'Amour, revue en dix-neuf scènes." It would have contented her until she had been forced to stop before another announcement and forced to learn another tag, had not her tongue tripped into another phrase, in spite of herself. She began to say, "L'amour revu et corrigé . . . Après l'original . . . par . . . par Anne Cradock." The hesitation she had in filling out the phrase brought it completely into her consciousness. She smiled at the conceit, and her smiling seemed to ripple joyfully through her whole body. She glanced up at the sky, and came near to laughing at three or four hard and woolly white clouds that trundled like white-tailed rabbits along before the wind.

She walked on deliberate and happy. A sign hanging in front of her : "*Concerts Bleu : à trois heures de l'après-midi*," held her attention. She went towards it. A young man selling flowers offered her a red rose : she walked past him, happier than ever in the thought that roses were already in bloom, and she was reading the concert programme at the door, before she remembered that the roses had probably come from the South or from a big hot-house. She detested hot-houses. They always reminded her of the orchids at Kew that always looked more animal than flower and gave her a queer feeling of horror. She started suddenly. A red rose had been pushed between her eyes and the concert bill. She followed the hand that held it, until her glance fell upon the youth who had offered her roses a moment ago. He was very offhand in his manner.

"Non, merci," she said automatically.

"Mais madame . . . Prenez-la, s'il vous plaît. . . ."

"Merci, je n'en veux pas."

"Mais madame . . . je vous la donne. . . ." In spite of his offhandedness he had begun to colour. In response to this rather than to his words Anne took the bud in her fingers. She was confused by the abruptness of the gift, and while she hesitated, holding the flower helplessly, she saw the young man lift his peaked cap. His hair was jet black,

clinging to his forehead in little streaks. The assurance of his twinkling little eyes hardly fitted with the rings of colour in his sallow cheeks.

“ . . . Vous êtes si belle, madame.”

She hurried through the swing-door into the lobby of the concert-room. While she hastily fumbled with her purse to find the five francs which the clerk at the *contrôle*, taking advantage of her irresolution, suavely demanded from her, she pricked her finger. A little pin had been stuck through the stem of the rose. She gathered up her ticket and pinned the bud into her coat.

She sat down and leaned back. A wave of physical sensation rose and passed through and about her body like a warm cloud, gathering itself from diffusion at her breasts, leaving them kindled and glowing, ascending to her face and steeping it as in intoxicating incense. From the piano came miniature cascades of sound, oddly fantastic, a procession of clumsy ridiculous toys, of all toys of which a child has ever been really fond, woodenly galloping horses, stiffly yodling men, the grave and definite tread of inflexible elephants. Pair by pair they came, conscious of their high and sacred mission, noisily themselves, out of the eternal Ark. Never was music with a vision more fixed or more inevitable. The endless procession prolonged into following pairs of living men and women fixed into darling toys for some pre-eminent child. The flower-boy was there, lifting his peaked cap with a rigid arm, incessantly, holding his roses as thanking the world for the bouquet given to him as he passed across the stage. With him went a doll woman, with spots of vivid red on her cheeks, and hair blacker even than his own cut in a deep square fringe like a geisha's; but she wore a black wooden coat with a painted red flower, and stared immovably in front of her.

The piano stopped. The clapping of hands made equal accompaniment to the procession that went on forming and passing before her. The fat man whom they had seen in a grey dust-coat and small-brimmed panama hat, wind-



ing his motor-car in the station yard at Boulogne, marched corpulently before his little car with the woman, her grey hair swathed in a black shawl, who had wheeled radiant oranges in a perambulator beside the train. Jim followed. His bigness made mock of his serious face. The mocking became sheer absurdity when suddenly his head screwed sharply right round and faced backwards, towards Maurice, whose nodding head swung steadily up and down, crowned by a shock of brown hair. Maurice was holding her hand, and she was for all the world the very woman who had walked out of the hotel that afternoon, stiffer perhaps in her pearl-grey coat and curling blue collar, but the more charming, only ridiculously small. She seemed to be shepherding the flock, for her vision would not go beyond. Into her head came the phrase she had learnt outside. "L'amour, revu et corrigé par Anne Cradock." She was curiously anxious to know whether that was the whole of her that had passed processionally before her eyes, closed to isolate the scene. She opened them. Two rows in front a man with fair hair and heavy eyelids that dropped down by their own sheer weight half-way over his eyes leant easily over the back of his chair to regard her. She was conscious of the warmth of the blood in her body, and the man seemed to have detected it. She looked steadily beyond him, too, where the pianist was making ready for another solo.

As the music began the fair-haired man lazily shifted back to face the piano, leaving his arm hanging loosely over the chair. Anne saw this though her eyes were fixed on the player. What he played was instantly familiar, Debussy's "*Jardin sous la Pluie*," and she anticipated her delight. But the presence of the fair-haired man in front of her determined her to control herself. She thought the music was wonderfully true to Paris as it had been to her of late, but her instant joy in its perfect fitness quickly faded. It was as though at a certain note in the music her heart had actually dropped, an infinitely little distance,

but through empty space. The Paris she had felt of late had been clear and beautiful, she thought, but now it seemed also to have been cold and apart from her. She had missed the warm outward radiance of herself into the world, of which the music's summer rain had waked her into awareness. It had been a wonderful spectacle, more wonderful because she had not known that it had been only a spectacle.

For a moment the contrast between the disappointment of her discovery and the joyful knowledge of the warmth and beauty of her own body made her so sad that she could have bent forward and wept great tears, like the intimate tears of a child. But the warm, wet notes poured about the hall, comforting her, although she knew that they would have comforted her yet more had she lost herself enough to cry. But they glanced before her eyes like golden sunlight on shower-wet leaves, and echoed in her ears like tinkling crystals. The sound of the music had begun to caress her before the misery of her thought could wholly chill the glow which had been kindled by the young man's rose.

When it ended, and the fair-haired man swung back again to regard her, she smiled at him in an irony of condescending pity, for she felt she had suddenly grown old. Realising with an unpleasant start that it was much better not to smile at him, however deep might be her irony and her pity, she looked steadily beyond him again to the piano on the platform. She quickly woke to a matter-of-fact mood, and waited only for the music to begin and the man to turn round again so that she could leave the concert-room untroubled. In this mood she waited impatiently, and while she waited she tried to dismiss her desire for tears and her melancholy awakening as sentimentalities. "As though it were the first time it's happened in a concert-room," she thought, as the music began and the fair-haired man slowly faced the piano.

She made her way out quickly, but her sternness with herself did not prevent her from being embarrassed at

passing the young man with the roses again. Beginning to walk hurriedly with an assumption of pressing purpose, she was checked by the feeling that it would be ungracious to ignore him. She hesitated in the lobby, and then walked out slowly, utterly undecided what to do. While she pretended to be busy with her veil before the long mirror, it occurred to her that she would pay him for the rose if she saw him. But then he would refuse, and that might be terrible. Anyhow, she could not offer him money—it was impossible. She turned round suddenly to surprise herself into action, and caught sight of him on the other side of the street. She seized the moment, and hurried away, involuntarily turning back the way she had come. “I’m going away from the station.” She stopped short in a kind of despair. Looking about her she saw a clock. Twenty-five minutes to four. Of course; the concert only started at three. The most sensible thing she could do was to hurry back to the hotel; and she kept on her way.

Nor did her denunciation of her own sentimentality suffice to reinstate the mood in which she had approached the concert. She could not help noticing, though she walked straight on and looked in front of her, the obstinate reality of a succession of short men, rather stout, with luxuriant beards and black portfolios, supported by fat hands. They would have depressed her had she not been constantly alert for the red poster. She passed by it quickly, for it seemed commonplace and sordid now. The memory of the music abode with her, and became a standard of criticism as she went along. She was disappointed with herself for having allowed the place to impose on her, but her disappointment did not make her so much unhappy as consciously superior to her surroundings, too individually herself to be cozened into responding instinctively to them. Not only was this rather contemptuous detachment uncomfortable and depressing to her, but she knew that it was wrong.



Something, somewhere, had been wrong in her since she came away from England. She had been indulging an appetite of weakness that she had discovered in Maurice, carefully administering an opiate. What if he woke out of his dreams too? She did not want to think of it. She had certainly done wrong, and the idea she took of the wrong she had done him was that she had not loved him enough. The alternative was plain. She must love him more. Some instinct warned her of the impossibility before she formed for herself the reply that he did not want to be loved any more. She felt the more keenly that she desired to love him more, and that he refused it. By his refusal he repressed her and made her conscious of the conflict between herself and the world. She was none too sure of her conclusion about Maurice, though she was certain of her own feeling about herself, and she was dimly oppressed by the foreboding that she did not know how to love him. Though she did her utmost to assure herself that it would be quite different on the morrow, she was disillusioned and critical as she entered the hotel.

She went to her bedroom first. She did not want to meet Dennis and Maurice immediately. Their voices sounded dully as she quietly opened her door. Inside she stood by the pier-glass idly tidying her dress. The voices sounded yet more plainly. Maurice's had an unexpectedly high pitch, and was more boldly borne into the room. He was excited about something.

Not for many months, perhaps years, had she been so reluctant to enter a company. She was perplexed about her own attitude, what she should say, how she should bear herself when she went through the door. Nothing in the situation, in Maurice or Dennis, suggested any problem of her behaviour that might worry her: but the hesitation had come once instinctively, and afterwards she could not but be conscious of herself. Her insecurity was apparent to herself, at least in her greeting to Dennis when she opened the door of the sitting-room. She was by a

fraction too ready with her outstretched hand, and she thought that she herself could have detected an effusiveness in her manner, and the faint indication of an attitude as she slowly closed the door. Fully in the presence of them both, she at once forgot her hesitations, and she waited, as she liked to wait, for Dennis to speak.

"I had to come. I was sick to death of the place and the job."

"Are you sure you didn't wait to finish the job first? . . . A Monday afternoon arrival is rather suspicious."

"We did the same ourselves, after all," said Maurice.

"Yes, I finished the job. You're right. I do wish you wouldn't deprive me of every shred of impulse, though."

"I don't think I do. I just take hold of your coat to see what's underneath; and before I can let go, you're off with your coat and have flung it on top of me. . . . That's nearer the truth at any rate. I'm sure I'm no enemy to romantic impulse. . . . Morry can bear me witness. . . . What of the Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece?"

Maurice laughed rather uncomfortably.

"What were you talking about just now? I heard your voice in the other room. You were very excited about something."

"I believe you were listening." He was nearly serious.

"Morry!" she expostulated.

"But where have you been?"

"I went out with the idea of meeting Dennis. He sent a second telegram at lunch. But the idea got lost in a concert-room. I've only just escaped." She recited her doings in monotone. "Now, Dennis, you tell me what he's been talking about."

"I was only giving him some idea of a book I wanted to write." Maurice hastily volunteered the information.

"Is that *all*?" said Anne.

"Well, I rather felt I wanted to be doing something," apologised Maurice. Anne glanced from him to Dennis, smiling.

"I'm afraid he's watered it down a bit," Dennis said.

"I'm afraid so, too. He could have whispered that. . . . How long are you going to stay here?" she asked.

"I don't know. As long as I like. I really have given up the hospital. Would you like it in black and white?" He hunted in his pocket-book, and handed her an official letter accepting his resignation. It was extremely eulogistic and regretful.

"So you've really done it?"

"Apparently."

Maurice reached for the letter and read it inattentively. He was fingering it still when he said:

"I suppose I was rather enthusiastic, wasn't I, Dennis? Being in Ramsay's studio this morning made me feel a bit of a worm. I felt it was about time I began to do something. There was something about a book, but that was only ideas—rottenly vague. . . . I felt I hadn't anything to put up against Ramsay. That's all."

"Get rid of the women and begin the masterpiece," said Anne, smiling.

Maurice reddened, and collected himself. "I mustn't be made fun of," he said.

"But I was perfectly serious."

He looked at Anne, wondering and anxious. Though she was smiling, he thought he could discover some trace of seriousness in her. His laugh was a half-hearted solution of his difficulty.

"But hadn't we better be getting ready to go?" he said.

"Are you sure you want me to come?" Anne asked.

"Oh, Anne . . . it's been arranged for days . . . you know it has."

"But you only told Mr. Ramsay to-day."

"Well, that doesn't make any difference, does it?"

"What about me?" asked Dennis.

"You're arranged, too." He was in a petty despair at petty vexations. "We'll start in ten minutes, and let's have a cab."



### CHAPTER III

DURING his sudden journey to Paris, Dennis had not felt all the confidence of an impulse. Although the morning of his departure had been quick and sunny, he had been uneasy, as a man's skin is uneasy when ruffled by an east wind. A thin, precarious line divided him from a sentimental despondency which crystallised in the worrying question why he had resigned his position. He did not so much regret the loss of it as feel unanchored and at drift without it. It needed but very little to set him revolving this thought incessantly, and he was dubious of his own ability to hold out against it when he reached the hotel. But Maurice had anticipated him with a despondency of his own. He had poured self-accusation for the past and ideas for the future into his ears, and had been so plainly agitated by his insufficiency that the contact stiffened Dennis. He was silently critical of Maurice's attitude and ideas, and a hard centre of insensibility, if not of antagonism, seemed to form inside him, which was a kind of ballast for his unanchored thoughts. When Anne entered he had been solidly confident of the rightness of his resignation, and impermeable to criticism. For the first time he could think "that's done," and put it definitely behind him. But he had noticed something unfamiliar in Anne, as she had entered. It had diminished from his confidence.

"What kind of a man is Ramsay?" he asked with indifference of Maurice in the cab.

Maurice broke into hyperbolic praise of Ramsay's completeness. Dennis was proof against the contagion of enthusiasm. To him it savoured more of self-condemnation. He said as much to Maurice.

"You're not talking about Ramsay. You're talking about yourself." Maurice was puzzled. He looked to Anne for enlightenment. She was engaged at the window.

"How terribly raw a new street in Paris does look," she said.

"They take long enough about it, too. This was just the same two years ago." Maurice went on explaining Ramsay to Dennis.

Ramsay's greeting to Maurice had its invariable quality. It seemed indefinitely to expand and include Anne and Dennis. Miss Etheredge was sitting on the sofa, splendidly large, leaning back negligently, her arms stretched out to make one lazily sweeping, but not unconscious curve with her delicately massive shoulders. The indifference which she so palpably assumed was heightened by the languid motion with which she put her cigarette to her lips. Then her fine, clear upper lip seemed to tighten and tremble. One would have said she was on the point of tears, had not tears been incongruous with her full and statuesque beauty. Maurice, always something afraid of her, hastened to greet her warmly. It was almost a measure of precaution.

"Hullo, Temple," she said, letting the white lids fall half over her eyes, pursing her mouth as though she would mince her speech. "Introduce me."

Ramsay, exchanging words with Anne, interrupted unknowing. "Mrs. Temple—Miss Etheredge, Miss Etheredge—Mr. . . ." Dennis himself supplied his name.

Anne saw the heavy eyes, the large and delicate oval face, the straight nose. Above all, she saw the trembling nostrils and the long, full upper lip with its chiselled furrow. Strangely, the sight moved her to say to Ramsay:

"Well, hardly Mrs. Temple, yet. I think I must be Mrs. Cradock here."

"Quite safe," said Ramsay. "I'm sorry I made the mistake."

"But I told you," said Maurice. He was confused by the contretemps, and he felt that Anne had betrayed him.

"It don't make any difference, one way or the other," said Miss Etheredge, looking steadily at Anne.

Anne sat on the sofa beside her. Ramsay moved deftly and steadily upon his appointed paths, preparing tea. Dennis roamed, indifferent and curious, about the room, wavering before the picture, and finally fixing himself by the long window, looking on to the yard. Maurice sat uneasy, with his hands in his pockets, on the corner of a white table in the middle of the room, looking from Dennis to the sofa, from the sofa to Dennis, uncomfortably aware of a curious glance which Miss Etheredge directed to him from time to time, and grateful when Ramsay appeared from the tiny kitchen, and interposed his body between the sofa and himself.

"This isn't your first visit to Paris, Mrs. Cradock?" said Miss Etheredge.

"No! But I've never been to Montparnasse before."

"I envy you. I wish all this"—she waved her cigarette about her—"was new to me. Even Ramsay's pictures are pretty stale by now." Ramsay came in with the boiling kettle, and bent over the table. "Bill, your pictures are stale. Why don't you get a new idea? I'm tired of this. I never realised before that sensuality was so boring."

Ramsay laughed. "Give me the new idea. I'll see what I can do with it."

"Well, try personality. A little more Bill and a little less idea. I prefer personality without the art to the art without the personality. But I'm not sure that there's any Bill left. I wish you wouldn't be quite so much of a machine. . . . Now, if you'd only be angry with me for what I'm saying, I'd adore you."

Ramsay's head was still bent over the teapot. Without raising it he nodded in his thoughtful, amused, incredulous way.

"You haven't seen my new picture," Miss Etheredge continued. "I'm sick of this cold-blooded designing. Why the devil should you mor-mortify the flesh like that?"



( 'Mortify the flesh' is right, isn't it, Mrs. Cradock ? I'm rather bad at these things. I didn't have the advantage of an Oxford education.) You never get any atmosphere if you tackle a picture like—a spiritual eunuch." She laughed excitedly. "Spiritual eunuch, yes, that's what you are. I must put you into my play. Spiritual eunuch married to the goddess of Art. . . . I'm writing a play, Mrs. Cradock, and I'm going to put them all in, him too." She nodded to Maurice, who had gone over to the window, and was standing with his arm on Dennis's shoulder and his back to the window.

"How far have you got with this masterpiece ?" said Ramsay.

"Far enough to make everybody uncomfortable ; but I haven't finished with Wauchope yet. . . .

"But you don't know what atmosphere is," she went on abruptly. "Any little fool can come along and talk about it. That's why you don't believe in it. But it's true for all that. Last night I was coming home from the other side, about half-past two in the morning, by the Louvre. As I came under the arch, I could have sworn I was in Edinburgh. You know the big *magasin*, Bill ? They had started rebuilding or something. There were great beams screwed together stuck up against the wall, quite black. Nobody about except a Chinaman, who had been following me for an hour." She laughed excitedly again. "The top of that place over the arches is all a kind of pink in the daytime. There was a bright moon and dead black shadows. I stood under the arch of the Louvre, with the big shop and the scaffolding warm rose and black on the other side of the square.

"Anything might have happened there. Oh, it was wonderful. That's atmosphere—where anything, any damn thing might happen. I tried to paint it all last night when I got in. I went at it till God knows when. I've only just got up. If you could do that, it's better than all your rotten old designs. That's got personality—sen-

suality—everything. Your sensuality is only theory. . . . You'd better come soon. I know I'll burn it when I see it again. I cut up my last four yesterday." Her voice was wet with suppressed tears. Anne saw them brimming in her eyes, always about to overflow.

"I'll come first thing to-morrow. I'm not painting," said Ramsay.

"May I come to see it?" said Anne.

"I'll try to keep it for you. I can't guarantee anything, you see." She laughed helplessly. "But come to-morrow."

"It's sure to be worth while," said Ramsay.

To Anne the remark was superfluous, even stupid. Yet Miss Etheredge seemed grateful. Anne was almost annoyed with her, for a moment, and then, because his words seemed to have comforted Miss Etheredge, was herself grateful to Ramsay.

Miss Etheredge tried hard to control herself into calm. Anne was infinitely apprehensive lest anyone but herself should notice it. Miss Etheredge seemed to care less.

"I haven't changed much, have I?" she said to Maurice.

"I'm glad," he said. The question was intimate and comforting for him.

"I really believe you are. I think you are the only one who's really *cared* a damn about me. . . . It's a good job Bill doesn't. . . . I'd have been turned out of his studio, years ago."

Ramsay laughed and went on talking to Dennis about hospitals and medical lectures, of which he, too, had had some experience.

"Have you been long together?" Miss Etheredge turned to Anne.

"No . . . hardly over a month." Anne saw the puzzled look in her eyes, and could not keep her own from smiling.

"Were you married a long while, before?"

"Quite a long while—years."

"Do you like him?" Miss Etheredge nodded to Maurice.

"Naturally."

"I'm being rude . . . but I can't make you out. Are you simple or very clever? Perhaps you're both." She looked at Maurice for some moments as though she were trying to understand him. "I don't suppose it matters very much. . . . I suppose you thought I was being a fool just now?"

"Not for a moment," said Anne quietly.

"Is that true?" Miss Etheredge's wonderful upper lip began to tremble. Anne made no reply by word, but looked at her. The glance, potent with Anne's deep desire to be near Miss Etheredge, to stand between her and the world of which she was contemptuous and afraid, did not fail.

"I was pretty lonely when you were here, wasn't I, Temple?"

Anne watched Maurice narrowly. She saw him give a little shudder, when he replied, "Ghastly."

"He cried over me a bit," Miss Etheredge explained to Anne. "It doesn't happen often. I liked him for it." Maurice smiled feebly at Anne. It was a depressing memory.

"Well, I'm even worse off now," went on Miss Etheredge. "Fernandez. . . . You remember Fernandez. . . . Oh, you never saw him . . . but you heard me talk about him. Well, Fernandez is gone. We had a great row, not so very long ago, and now he cuts me dead."

"What about?" asked Maurice.

"Oh, I don't know." She bent down and busied herself with putting her cigarette ash into a saucer. Maurice could see the film of unformed tears through her long lashes. "I had my revolver, and tried to shoot him—something like that. It's a complicated story." She turned to Anne. "It always ends like that. There's nobody except Bill, and Bill doesn't care a hang, does he?" She spoke to Ramsay, who was drawing a diagram of some proposition in physics on the table. He glanced up, then down at his pencil, then up again at Miss Etheredge.



"The only reason that he sticks there is that you can't quarrel with him, can you, Bill?"

"It's pretty hard," he said.

Dennis had been vaguely watching her before. As Ramsay looked up from his diagram, his eyes followed and looked at her steadily. She returned his look coolly. It was rather repartee than curiosity or interest. Her lip did not tremble. Dennis bent down again to consider Ramsay's reasoning, resumed with the pencil.

"But a theory like that isn't a fact. It's only a symbolic way of stating facts that you can't discover. There's a gap that must be filled with something, and as nobody knows what does fill it, everybody agrees that the neatest arrangement is the true one. They can't even tell whether it works or not. . . ."

"But look here . . ." protested Ramsay.

"That's Bill all over," said Miss Etheredge. "He's always boiling his personality down into a proposition of Euclid. It wouldn't matter so much if he didn't believe in it. . . . Perhaps it's as well. . . . He'd go like the rest. . . . Do you have days like this? I have weeks of them."

"Days, yes. I don't think they're as bad as yours, though."

"Mine are something special. . . . You're older than me, ain't you?"

"I'm thirty-two."

"Six years. It's a good deal. . . . I can't make you out." At that moment Maurice realised that he had not made Anne out either. Even now he felt much nearer to Miss Etheredge than to Anne. He looked from her, and with his chin on his hands, watched Anne curiously.

"Have you got many friends?" said Miss Etheredge.

"Very few."

"Why?"

Anne smiled in a semi-perplexity. "I think I got tired of asking first-rate things from second-rate people. I'm very self-absorbed, too."

"That sounds very deep. . . ."

"It's not. It's only the words. I fancy I'm not very good at words. But I don't believe it's difficult for you. I should think you'd have done the same thing. Perhaps the difference between us is that you expect more from life than I do."

"I shouldn't wonder."

Anne's last sentence struck very chill upon Maurice. He felt it was somehow unfair to him. Anne ought not to have said it. After all, they were together for something. It was a kind of treason to ring down the curtain on their future like that.

He pretended mere curiosity as he interrupted :

"How do you mean you don't expect as much from life as Miss Etheredge ?" he asked.

"I don't venture quite so much, so my mistakes don't cost me so much."

"I understand," said Miss Etheredge.

Maurice resented that. The privilege of understanding Anne was his. But Miss Etheredge's acquiescence shut him off from asking more. He could not show himself behind her in understanding. He was jealous, and he turned dully to watch Ramsay and Dennis. He hadn't got very near to Anne, he thought, and yet they were near enough, surely. He had been perfectly happy all the while they had been in Paris. It was a glow in his memory, suffused, too, into the present. The half-formed suspicion that it had been nothing more than a supreme holiday flitted across a window of his mind. It was driven into the unknown whence it came. Ramsay asked him a question.

"That was your idea about the Egyptians, wasn't it, Temple ?"

It was, indeed, one of the few theories he had himself excogitated, yet not communicated to Dennis, for it belonged to a period before Dennis had become important to him. He burst into anxious explanation, not without pride.

The two women were silent, idly watching.

"Does this interest you?" said Miss Etheredge.

"Sometimes, not now. Just now they seem to me too much like children playing a game."

Dennis alone of the men heard the remark. His interest in the discussion was but desultory and half-hearted. Anne's opinion chimed with his own, and he would make this plain to her.

"We'd better change places," he said to Maurice. "I'm getting off my ground. You won't gain anything by talking across me."

Maurice accepted his profession of incompetence without question, and moved into Dennis's chair without even raising his eyes from Ramsay's pencil. Dennis settled himself and looked at Miss Etheredge. He had noticed her, when he came into the room, but as anyone might have noticed a woman of an obviously magnificent and unfamiliar kind. It was Anne's evident interest in her, and the immediate sympathy which contrasted strongly with his recollections of Anne's attitude to other women, rather than any impulse of his own which prompted the deliberate scrutiny he had afterwards made. While he had been talking with a superficial absorption to Ramsay, he had felt that Anne and Miss Etheredge were completely apart, somehow united and impregnable in the company. Anne did not move out of their stronghold to welcome him, as he drew forward in his chair, away from the theorists. She seemed to be guarding Miss Etheredge, against him or against herself. It was rather against herself, for Miss Etheredge had no hesitations in approach.

"I suppose all this sort of thing is new to you, too," she said.

"Very new. I'm feeling very much lost in it all. The theories are too deep and the pictures too strange."

"You feel altogether rather superior, don't you?"

He was not at all prepared for the sudden thrust. The surprise of an unexpected bludgeon, where he might have



expected a rapier, stunned him. But he was not the man to show it.

"I never heard of a good doctor who imagined himself superior to a painter, not even the very worst painter (I dare say a bad doctor might think himself better than Velasquez, so I leave bad ones out). A good one would have a sneaking admiration for a first year student at the Academy."

"So you're a good doctor, are you?"

"I was," he said.

"That's a good thing. I hate doctors. I've seen too many of them. My father was one. They're so damn self-confident. Painters are bad enough. They can generally floor anybody by talking about their studio; but a doctor always carries a stethoscope sticking out of him somewhere. You can't get at him when he hides behind it. . . . What did you give it up for?"

Dennis knew that Anne was watching him. He was distinctly uncomfortable. If he were to devote himself to a victory over Miss Etheredge, to which she sorely tempted him, he would antagonise Anne. If he allowed himself to be overcome by her, not only would he feel smaller in Anne's sight, but she herself would be disappointed in him. Instinctively he had recourse to as much of candidness as was possible for him.

"I don't really know how I gave it up. I've been saying I would give it up any time during the last three years. Somehow I never did, and I can't see why I didn't go on in the same way. However, I didn't. I resigned my job about a week ago. Now I'm surprised at myself."

"That's very nice for you. . . ."

"And quite unusual." There was a portentous hostility beneath her words, and their failure to express it made them nearly ludicrous. Dennis found it better to ignore the hostility altogether. The violence of Miss Etheredge's attack lay rather in her tone than her actual words, which

were headlong and clumsy. The very way in which she exposed herself in attack fascinated him.

"I suppose you think you're very clever," said Miss Etheredge. The curious intonation of her voice, an equable and clearly marked cadence in her words, and the real malice she managed to convey into them prevented Dennis for an instant from realising how childish they were. He realised it with a start of surprise. They were the actual words of innumerable actual children. It was an experience unlike any that he had had before. To have replied to the malice in the words would have demanded all his energy, to reply to the actual words was a triviality he had forgotten in his teens. He recovered himself with difficulty.

"Not so very clever," he said. "But as clever as most people. But what makes you think I am so very clever?"

"I don't." Miss Etheredge sucked at her cigarette. Her full upper lip protruded too far for the gesture to appear anything but conscious. She looked across Anne at the wall. A faint and very uncertain smile in her eyes, that seemed to be drawn and puckered forward like her lips. Her legs were crossed, and one swung with a vigorous indifference.

"Then why did you say so?"

She took the cigarette out of her mouth and slowly turned her face half-way towards him. "I don't know," she said, and resumed her smoking, her stare, and her leg-swinging.

Dennis knew that if any other woman had behaved like this it would have been ridiculous and contemptible. Miss Etheredge was neither, save to ridiculous and contemptible people. Her perversity was so plainly a mere veneer. Nevertheless, it baffled him. He hated her inscrutability. He could do nothing but look at her. He glanced at Anne. She might have been the impartial arbiter between them, so little could be read in her eyes as they slowly turned from regarding Miss Etheredge to meet his.

"Do you like clever people?" Miss Etheredge asked Anne.

"Do you mean the really clever, or the other kind? I like the really clever ones. I've met very, very few. . . . I like him. I think he's really clever."

"Do you now? . . . I must have met only the other kind, I think. There are so many people who are supposed to be clever here." She spoke generally to both Anne and Dennis. "They madden me. You can't believe what fools I can make them look in a couple of minutes. And then they hate me for it. . . . I don't wonder. . . . I dare say he hates me now." She looked at Dennis, with a wry smile. Her voice was liquid and full.

"Not a bit. Why should I?"

"After all, I didn't make a fool of you." She might have been in despair at the failure.

"It was touch and go, anyhow."

Miss Etheredge faced the wall again. After a moment she turned herself half towards him, looking down through her half-closed eyes towards him, mincing her words through her pursed lips.

"Are you coming to see my picture?"

"I'd like to very much."

"That's very good of you . . . but it's nice to have one visit before I quarrel with you." She faced the wall while she spoke. "I told you I couldn't guarantee the picture. It's pretty certain it won't be there. . . . I'd take a bet on it. . . . So you'd better come when something will be certain, tea-time. . . . But come when you like. . . . Look here, I'll give you the address."



## CHAPTER IV

THE bell tinkled, and Ramsay, with his pencil still in his fingers, went to open the door.

"Hullo, A. S.," he said, as though thinking of something altogether different, and began to walk back to his seat, leaving Wauchope free to enter through the open door. Then he recollected himself. "But you don't know these people." And perfunctorily he introduced Dennis and Anne—Anne as Mrs. Cradock. Wauchope stood in the middle of the room with his hat and coat in his hands, bowing and peering towards the table. Ramsay sat down, looking at his diagrams on the table, and drew curves. He wrinkled his forehead when he raised his eyes to glance at Wauchope.

"Good afternoon, *Mr. Wauchope*," said Miss Etheredge, looking away from him to the wall. She turned half-way to meet him as he came forward with outstretched hand.

"I hardly expected the pleasure of meeting *you* here," he said.

Even Maurice began to watch them furtively. The tone of their greeting imparted some electric current to the company. His argument with Ramsay automatically ceased.

"No?" she said, and puffed at her cigarette.

"It occurs so seldom that we must make the most of it," Wauchope said, as he drew forward a chair and sat on Dennis's right hand. "Bill, could you manage just one cup of tea for me? It doesn't matter if it's cold. *Pour me donner du courage.*" His glance paused on the way back from Ramsay and fixed upon Anne. She quickened in antagonism under it; but she was so little excited that she knew herself master of the situation.

"Are you, by any chance, a relation of the dramatic critic?" Wauchope asked.

"Yes," she said. "He is my husband."

"I beg your pardon. I was under a misapprehension." He turned an explanatory glance towards Maurice and Ramsay.

Dennis felt that he did not like Wauchope, but he tried in vain to despise him. It was curious that he was able to agitate Miss Etheredge so much. For that power, in spite of himself, he rather envied him. Ideally Maurice would have indignantly denounced him, but knowing it impossible, had a sneaking admiration of his sangfroid.

"Of course, he's in my play," said Miss Etheredge to Anne and Dennis. "He's the ragged harlequin. The suit was new once, but it's getting rather worn now, isn't it, *Mr. Wauchope*? . . . One or two extra patches don't matter. They're all in the scheme of decoration."

"Aren't you being rather obscure? It's difficult for Mrs. Cradock and Mr. Beauchamp to understand, surely. I'm not quite certain that I understand myself."

"How's Miss Farrell?" Miss Etheredge asked inconsequently. Her white face was a trifle paler. Her leg swung violently. Never for a moment did she look at Wauchope.

"Quite well, when I last saw her," he said. "She told me if I saw you to give you her love."

Miss Etheredge was beside herself.

"I suppose she didn't give you the ten pounds she owes me?"

"No, she didn't say anything about that."

"Well, I'm going to have it back. You can tell her that, if you see her again." Miss Etheredge's voice rose. "People come and live on you and borrow your money, when you haven't got enough to pay your baker or your rent, and then they just clear out without a word, and go and live with some fool of a man who'll keep them for a month. Then they come running back. She'd better not try that this time. You can tell her that, too, *Mr. Wau*

chope. Tell her I'm very grateful that she left my revolver behind."

Wauchope ostentatiously turned to Anne.

"You're not in the movement—not 'one of us'—I suppose, Mrs. Cradock?"

Anne was reluctant to be made, even faintly, accessory to the quarrel, doubly reluctant to be opposing Miss Etheredge; but she could hardly help replying:

"No, I don't think I've ever managed to be in any movement at all."

"That's a rare experience. It's only come to me late in life. I think I must be like you, now; for as far as I can see I've been turned out of this one—turned out or left behind. But you don't mean to say you don't paint or write or make music?"

"No, I don't do any of those things." Anne had to receive the conversation made for her by Wauchope, but she was not at all inclined to assist him. Miss Etheredge watched him constantly, with an obvious sneer. Wauchope appeared perfectly unconscious of her presence. Dennis listened to the conversation with the indifference of a spectator. He was both anxious and afraid to speak to Miss Etheredge, and he waited in expectation of an explosion. He was fascinated by the large way in which she showed that she was incapable of concealing her feelings or careless of showing them.

Ramsay glanced up under his wrinkled forehead and waited a moment, inspecting the company.

"A. S., you come and help us out of this," he said. "Temple can't see my arguments. He's getting sentimental." Ramsay made room for Wauchope between them and shifted nearer to Anne. "I hope you're not responsible for this," he said to her. "He's a regular heretic now."

Wauchope, really relieved at the diversion, came round. "What's it all about?" he asked.

Maurice explained that he could not see why the fact, if it were a fact, that the whole universe resolved into



material atoms, should be regarded as an explanation of life, much less of art.

"What's your idea, first?" asked Wauchope.

"I quite agree that there are atoms—or something of the sort. But they can't be everything. There must be something to sort them and shape them. Or does he mean than they do it themselves?"

"Well, there are such things as attraction," said Ramsay, not yet wholly decided to leave his argument to Wauchope. "Forces. . . ."

Maurice, the master of a small dialectic, was confident and happy in the prospect of a fair field.

"Are the forces all of the same kind?" he began.

"You ought to meet Miss Netta Farrell," said Miss Etheredge to Anne. "She's a *type* I don't suppose you've ever seen."

"Is she so very remarkable? What is she like?"

"She looks fine, slim, not too tall, small breasts—rather like a boy. She was staying with me up to about six weeks ago. Came and said I was her only friend. So I was. At all events she lived off me and didn't pay a penny of the rent. She had twice as much money as I had. Brought her men along to my flat." She laughed excitedly. "Perhaps she thought she was doing me a good turn, bringing them along to me when she had finished with them—handselling my bridal couch. Oh, yes, Netta's a rare one. She was funny, too." Her voice ran higher and higher.

"I shan't ever forget the trick she played on me with Bowley. You don't know Bowley, do you? He's an American with a face like a Jewish gorilla, who wears wide check trousers. Oh, Bowley's a great man, I can tell you. He had a profound passion for me once. Used to be always following me across the street, asking me if I'd go to the *Tabarin* with him, and sending boxes of chocolate up to my flat—studio, I should say. Yes, you must meet Bowley. He's one of those Americans with a highly

developed moral sense who never marry their mistresses, and never pay a *cocotte* more than trade union rates. . . .

"When Netta turned up, he wasn't quite so sweet on me any more." She laughed hysterically. "But he was terribly sorry for Netta, terribly. Besides, she was going to be very ill for her wickedness, very. Oh, I didn't tell you what she came over here for. That's important. In England she had a great man called Benjamin, really Benjamin, who used to walk about in a deer-stalker hat, and had made a fortune out of a patent beer engine, or something like that. He's a queer type, too, is Benjamin. A devil of a lot more in him than you'd think. He's got the insides of a child, for all his money and his hats and his guns. Netta told me some wonderful stories about him." She laughed again; all her words were carried upon a note that rose precariously between a shriek and a laugh. "Well, Benjamin was keen on Netta. He never used to have a home—always a suite of rooms in a hotel. He used to cry about it sometimes. Anyhow, there was going to be a little Benjamin, and that's why she came over here, to see that there shouldn't be. She came to me, because when she was a model, I was always fond of her. She's different from all the others. She's got personality, I can tell you."

Miss Etheredge stopped abruptly. "No, I'd better not go on with this story. It's very improper." Miss Etheredge was crying, but making no sound. Anne and Dennis could see the two large tears that rolled from her eyes. "Netta's a woman you won't meet in a hurry. Perhaps I'll tell you the story when you come to see me. It's something to come for."

"What's happened to her now?" asked Anne.

"She went off with Bowley for a day or two. After that I don't know. She came back to me once, but I didn't let her in. She was outside the door calling out, 'Let me come in. Let me come in.' I wasn't doing anything of the sort, though. She said she'd tell all my relations about

me. She'd have some trouble to find them. I should myself. I don't know where she is now. But I've got a pretty good idea. You should ask *Mr. Wauchope* there." She raised her voice so that he could hear, but he went on undisturbed with his argument.

"Oh, it's a damn funny world, isn't it? When you have to turn out the only woman you can tolerate, and she first clears off without paying you a penny herself, and goes and blues all her money with some ghastly idiot of a man between Monday and Thursday night. It wouldn't matter if she got hold of a decent man. But Bowley, my God! He's got about as much notion of personality as the table here. It's funny.

"And then if you ask her why she does it, she says, 'Because he is such a poor dear fool.' And it's not very hard to understand either. A woman with personality—most of them—have got the choice between that and hysteria. I don't wonder they'd sooner have Bowley. Believe I would myself, if my father hadn't been a doctor. . . . Oh, no, you can't get rid of *Netta* as *he'd* like to." She nodded at *Wauchope*. "She's just herself, and it wouldn't matter what she did or what happened to her; she'd always have some shred of herself on, and you'd have to take off your hat to that, *Mr. Beauchamp*."

"I should," murmured *Dennis*.

*Miss Etheredge* was silent for a little while. *Anne* was thinking about what she had said. *Dennis* felt that his own word had been ridiculously inadequate, and that anything he might have said would have been equally out of place. *Miss Etheredge* did not seem to think so. She looked at him with less antagonism than she had yet manifested towards him. Her voice almost lapsed into friendliness.

"I believe you would. . . ."

*Maurice's* voice rose in the ensuing silence.

"But thinking isn't everything. I don't mean that you get anywhere if you give it up, just because you give it up.



That's mysticism and rot. But you never really do get anywhere by thinking alone. You believe you do, Ramsay, but you're only deceiving yourself. Take your painting a picture . . ."

"It's a terrible pity your father was a doctor," said Anne to Miss Etheredge. "Or that you had a father at all. . . ."

She looked doubtfully, enquiringly at Anne.

"I mean you pay for your personality. The more you pay the more you have. But there's a limit . . ."

"You think I've reached the limit? . . . Yes, I should think so. . . . I wonder sometimes how long I can go on being lonely. . . . I quarrel most with the people I like best. That's in my destiny. Some nights I could go mad with thinking about it. You say my father has something to do with it? . . . You weren't an actress, were you?" she asked inconsequently.

Dennis was rather surprised that Anne took the question seriously. She shook her head gravely.

"That's true?" asked Miss Etheredge again. "Only you look like one. I don't mean one of the *types* of the Folies Bergères or the Gaiety, but a real actress—an artist. There's something about your mouth, and your eyes. . . . I know I've never seen them before, but I seem to remember them. Do you know what I mean? No, you wouldn't say. Do you see what I mean?" she asked Dennis, and did not wait for an answer. "There will be some word for it. The only one I know is tragic—and that sounds like Madame Steinheil. . . . Was anybody very bad to you?"

"No. . . . Why do you ask?"

"Only you look as though—someone might have been. . . . But it might have been anything else. It's what I meant when I said I remembered your face, though I knew I hadn't seen it."

Dennis sat forward in his chair to watch and listen. Before his mind hovered the unpleasant thought that he

fell in a void between Anne who could thus quietly induce Miss Etheredge to forget herself and Wauchope who could irritate her into a frenzy of unreserve by a look. She had been hostile to him but he had played no conscious part in exciting her hostility. He desired to affect her directly, to compel her. Without that it seemed to him that he was, somehow, unworthy, and that his claim to be an individual person was false. In his moments of detachment he could admire them both, not unenviously, for the completeness of their contact and of their separation from the others. But continually this detachment failed him, as it were dissolved away before a desperate desire to prove his own worth by forcing Miss Etheredge to acknowledge his power.

He found himself looking in Anne's face for the quality which Miss Etheredge had seen there, wondering why he had not detected it before. He thought he could see it now, but so soon as he tried to define it in her face it escaped him. Anne seemed suddenly to become young, as though in the effort of searching her face a new vision of her triumphantly superseded the old. And she did look young. Her mouth was not full; though it was not hard, it would have needed much to make it tremble. It was firm and confident like a young girl's. So was the definite oval of her face; but perhaps a little thinner, not merely bounded, but shaped within itself, and at rare moments pallidly grey. It was her eyes that held the secret. One could not look at them now, he thought, without referring them to a past, when the brown pupils had been clear with perpetual surprise. Now they seemed to have been dusted over with faint red gold. They had darkened themselves from their former clearness, settled down into the dull glowing shimmer, which must, he thought, kindle to everything, if one could but see, in its degree, but for him so rarely seemed to flame out of their grave fire.

It was an effort for him to remark so much, and he was conscious of the unfamiliarity of the scrutiny while he made

it. Somehow he had accepted Anne as a whole person, with whom he was sure, not by reason of his knowledge of her, but of his trust in her. When Miss Etheredge thus revealed to him something of Anne, he felt that he had been blind. He felt more strongly than ever before that she inscrutably enclosed him, stretching beyond his knowledge on every side. Miss Etheredge was infinitely easier. He was less secure with her—if he knew her more, he would be less secure still—but there were moments when he thought that he could dominate her more completely. Her secret was so palpably there, indeed so palpably defended against him, that it could not exceed his knowledge. He wanted to know it. Obscurely he felt that the knowledge would be a gain to his resources of power.

“Yes, I wish I knew you,” said Miss Etheredge to Anne, after a silence. “But you’d be very hard to get at . . . perhaps you’re like me.”

The words came oddly to Dennis after his thoughts. He had hardly suspected Miss Etheredge would be at a loss, or would confess it, if she were.

Wauchope rose abruptly from the discussion. “Perhaps it doesn’t matter very much anyway. . . .”

“If these things don’t matter, what the hell does?” asked Ramsay, half laughing. . . . “Everything else is quite straightforward, once you’ve got the general hang of it, and an idea to go on with yourself.”

“But we all envy you, Bill—all of us.”

“Even I don’t find it all so simple,” said Maurice.

“That’s only because you’ve not got the hang of it yet. People make an enormous fuss about life. It’s only sentimentality. I don’t know why they should like to think they’ve got an impossible row to hoe, but they do. You’ve only got to wait for your idea. . . .”

“It’s too damnably true. Think of the time you can spend waiting,” said Wauchope.

“Oh, but you’ve got such a silly idea of your own importance, A. S., not you only, but everybody almost.



You're never content to find an idea for yourself. You want one that'll save the world. It's no good—one of these Christian ideas. The world never will be saved—and it'd be a rotten place if it were. I think I must have been born with the sentimentality knocked out of me."

"I think you're very wise, Bill," said Wauchope, with sudden seriousness. ". . . But what I really came for were those books you said Fernandez brought here. I'll want them if I'm going away. . . ."

"So you're going away, *Mr. Wauchope*," said Miss Etheredge.

He turned to her and bowed slightly.

"Not going to leave Netta behind, surely?" she pursued.

"I'm afraid I shall have to," he said, after a pause, as having pondered a suggestion. "I can't discover any particular reason why I should take her. . . . Perhaps you have one?" he added suavely.

"Well—since you lived off her good luck, you might as well give her a holiday off yours. . . . I'm sure she'd enjoy your company."

"Perhaps so," he said reflectively. "You know so much more of Miss Farrell than I do. But I'm afraid it can't be managed. I'm going first thing to-morrow morning."

"Most convenient way of getting rid of her." Miss Etheredge was in her old attitude, regarding the wall. The extravagance of her indifference returned with the excited quickening of her voice.

Wauchope made no reply to her. He gathered his coat and his hat. "Get those books for me, will you?" he said to Ramsay. His action drove Miss Etheredge to visible frenzy.

"I thought you'd run away—but, you know, I can't hurt you." Each word had a peculiar fullness, as though it came with added resonance through tears. "I shan't tell anybody about the postmistress in Ardrothan Street, or mesmerism *à la carte*. It's not interesting to tell people

a little clerk's affairs. But you might as well say before you go whether you'll pay her what you lifted from her. I'm interested in that. Then I can get some of my own money back. Don't be afraid. It won't spoil the beautiful romantic situation if you give her a thousand francs. She'd take it right enough now. I know Netta. Besides, it would be a good idea to come back with a new patch—a nice new one of bourgeois honesty. I should love to see you with it on."

Wauchope took the books from Ramsay, who stood looking at Miss Etheredge as one interrupted in thought. Wauchope shook hands with Maurice.

"You're probably far better off at the hotel than at my studio," he said. Maurice admired the way he managed this nervous affair. Then Wauchope bowed his adieu to the rest of the company and went out. "I'll send you my address," he said to Ramsay.

"You wouldn't believe I once thought that that man was me only friend," said Miss Etheredge. The self-mockery in her intonation of the last three words was palpable.

"That's just what I should have believed," said Dennis.

It was a real glance that she gave him in reply. It seemed to have more of curious apprehension than the anger he had so deliberately courted. Her heavy chin dropped, while she looked towards him, and for once her wonderful mouth opened indecisively for an instant, was weak and unlovely. She recovered.

"Yes, Wauchope and Etheredge were a pretty pair once, weren't they, Bill? We were the real geniuses. We told each other so often enough. Now he's got fifty other people to tell him the same . . . but I bet he doesn't believe it quite as much. I dare say that's why he doesn't call me one any more. I don't know but I don't think he does, somehow. . . ." She laughed. "He's a highly superior person, now. . . . He doesn't invite everyone to

see how he can hypnotise Netta now. . . . But he is very proud of himself when he can get her into his studio without anybody knowing. . . . Yes, it's very important for him to keep on the right side of Netta. . . . He has to wait till my lady makes some remark about him, so that he can know something about himself. He can carry on with that for a fortnight. I should think that Netta and I, between us, we made him, that way. Then he gets frightened that we should know too much, more than he can understand himself.

"Oh, he's frightened of Netta, I can tell you; but he can't quite do without her, for all that. . . . Sometimes he'd murder her for what she says about him, but he—he'd never murder anybody. I remember when he first came to me and said: 'Netta's a great woman.' He wouldn't say that now—but he believes it. It frightens him because she laughs at him. He's in a holy terror of finding out that there's nothing inside at all, only a lot of little tricks he's picked up. He's clever enough to pick them up better than anybody, and he still goes on learning them. I don't envy him when he finds out that there's nothing inside at all. The funny thing is that he'll find it out just when they give him a last dose of morphia for a painless exit. . . . I'll have to draw him then. It'll make a nice little picture, call it 'The Last Patch.' Netta will see the joke. Lord, that's another drawing. Netta explaining the picture to Wauchope. 'Etheredge, you're a great woman.' That's the one thing I've really got. You'll have to see they put it on my tombstone, Bill. 'Wauchope was afraid of me.'

"No wonder people hate me, is it, Mrs. Cradock? But it don't matter. It's something, after all, to be really hated by everyone you ever knew. It makes things exciting when you know that every time you come into a party it stops like dead. It might be all right if there was always a party where you could turn up. . . . By Jove, I feel I could work now. 'The Last Patch.' I shall be at



that all night. That's an idea, isn't it, Bill? I ought to make something of that, oughtn't I?"

"I should rather think so," said Ramsay, with conviction.

"But Bill's had enough just now. Quite enough for one little tea-party. . . . But I am amusing, aren't I?"

Miss Etheredge got up. She stood easily massive, fronting him as in a challenge to a fight. She seemed to slouch, without moving. So she held out her hand to him. Before he took it, "Oh, I'm forgetting," she said, with the forcible drawl which was natural to her quieter moments. "I lose my party manners after I've been talking to the mirror for a fortnight. . . . Perhaps you're coming, too—or shall I say good-bye?"

In answer Anne had risen and already shaken hands with Ramsay.

"When shall we see you again?" asked Maurice. "Can't we have dinner together?"

It was arranged for the morrow. They would go together to a café afterwards.

They came into the street together. Miss Etheredge walked in front with Anne.

"I can spoil things properly, can't I?" she said, emptily laughing to cover her seriousness.

"It depends what you mean by spoil."

"You mean I gave you one side show instead of another?"

Anne was suddenly angry. "If you like," she said shortly.

Miss Etheredge looked on the ground; as she slowly walked her heavy body swung round from side to side. Dennis, regarding her from behind, wondered whether, had he not heard her speak and seen her face, he would have recognised her now for what he did, a woman apart from her kind. Beside hers, Anne's slim body, apparent through the squared coat by the perceptible motion which she gave to each little sliding step, as though she were

treading a secure and invisible wire, seemed again girlish. Anne was somehow so bewilderingly virgin. A certain naiveness in what he knew was the perfection of her movement, recalled to his mind unsophisticated pictures, always of the Virgin, and always pictures. Miss Etheredge, by contrast, had a heavy earth-born sensuality in her gait. His mind, ordinarily unimaginative of physical things, fastened upon the vision of her large, slow-swinging breasts. It was a strange tweak for his vision, and he could not forget it.

"She is wonderful, though," said Maurice unexpectedly.

"Who?" asked Dennis.

"Why, Miss Etheredge. Don't you think so? . . . She depresses me terribly," he added.

"It wouldn't take you very long to hate me, would it?" said Miss Etheredge to Anne.

"Something else would come first, I know."

"What do you mean?"

"I should hate myself for being concerned about you. . . . You'd make it intolerable, by letting yourself down too often. . . . That's if I did hate myself. I very seldom do, very seldom."

"You seem to know a great deal about yourself. It's very queer for a woman; but you don't seem to me very female, somehow. There's something in you like there is in Netta." She groped perceptibly for a word. "Un-suppressed . . . I suppose it would be. Nothing with a lid on, screwed up. . . . But you do know a lot about yourself, don't you?"

"Not very much—not even whether what you just said is true."

The street turned suddenly. Anne found herself before an unexpected square. On the far side heavy steam trams rumbled distantly down the sloping road and disappeared in a vista of tall houses and little trees. Another climbed, urging upwards its rigid frame, noisily shaken by the laborious pantings to which it could not yield. A cold grey stole over the sky, like a creeping film of ice, narrowing

the last transparent blue. The air was still warm, but the distances were clear and chilly. Even the vague, black with gathered trees, into which the upward road entered and was lost, was indistinguishably clear, as something seen through gross thick glass. One spot of hazardous warmth maintained itself where an early lamp shone through trees near by, and diffused its radiance through the leaves into gold and green, infinitely repeated, and growing stronger, as the last direct light climbed slowly out of the sky.

Right across the square, as they waited on the pavement edge a row of lights kindled along the parapet of a low building, making coloured posters dimly visible on the wall below. The tall houses that flanked it, loomed in the light from large to gigantic and unscalable.

"I suppose I had better be going back to my garret," said Miss Etheredge.

"Do you not come our way?" asked Anne.

"No . . . but you are coming to-morrow, aren't you? . . . Oh, I haven't given you the address. 23 rue Sévigné—you'll remember that. . . . I think I should like to . . . no, I'd better be going home . . . do penance for this afternoon. Good-bye, Mrs. Cradock. Don't forget to-morrow, whatever you do. Good-bye, Mr. Beauchamp. I'm sure I've shocked you, but you'd better come—see the beast in its own haunts. Good-bye, Temple. You're too interested in your silly theories. . . . Are you coming too?"

"Of course," he said, and then hesitated. "I'm not quite sure. I may have something to do."

"Not going to stand sentry at the Parthenon. . . . I wouldn't. . . ."

They watched for the little way before she turned the corner. Even when she had disappeared, Maurice still stared at the corner. Anne and Dennis moved away towards a cab. "Come on, Morry," said Anne.

He ran the few steps after them. "That's not the way to the rue Sévigné," he said.



"People have been known to buy things on their way home," said Anne.

"Yes," said Maurice absently.

Dennis addressed Anne. "Do you mind if we walk part of the way home? I feel I would rather walk than drive. . . . But perhaps you're tired?"

"No," she said, and they began to descend the slope. Only at long intervals did any word pass between them, and those that were spoken seemed to hang low as a sound carried over water, reluctantly uttered and moving reluctantly. Each in his measure was heavy and depressed. So soon as they began to walk Anne felt the depression gather into a physical fatigue. The joints of her arms relaxed and were powerless. Maurice was continually confronted by pictures of himself and Etheredge together when he used to visit her three years before. She would sit in her littered room and weep, and while she wept had laughed and said to him: "But you're too young, Temple. You are so very young." He had accepted it, and even been glad. It opened broad vistas of life to him. The remembered tone of her voice brought him to a discovery. She had been glad, too. Perhaps, even she had been half in love with him. Something began to burn tightly within him, as though neither smoke could escape nor flame breathe, at the thought. He felt again the firm warmth of her massive body as he had put his arm round her in an instinctive, frightened attempt to comfort her. He wished he had kissed her. He desired to kiss her now. Anne must surely know what he was feeling. Apprehensive even of the new colour that must run in his cheeks, the excited shortness with which his breath must be taken, he started as if he had been discovered, when Dennis spoke.

"I must be clean off things. I suppose this road and this weather are rather wonderful. They don't seem even real to me. . . . The air's fresh enough, though. . . ."

"I'm very tired," said Anne. "I think I'll drive. I can rest a little before dinner."

"Don't let us have dinner at the hotel," urged Dennis. "We'll go somewhere where there's any amount of music, plenty of life." He laughed at his own phrase. "What do you say to that? I've got plenty of money—for once in a way."

"Yes," said Maurice eagerly. "I can't stand the idea of the hotel to-night."

"We'll go to Montmartre," said Anne. "You won't drive with me, will you?"

"I'd rather walk," said Dennis.

"You'll have to show him the way," said Anne to Maurice.

"Au revoir." She hailed a fiacre and drove away.

"We aren't very bright, are we?" said Maurice.

"Bright! Good God! Your Miss Etheredge has fairly taken it out of me. . . ." Then they walked on.

"What sort of a man is this Wauchope?" asked Dennis.

"I don't know any more about him than you do. I only met him to-day. I used to hear them talk about him. He's supposed to be very clever. . . . He's been a friend of Ramsay's for a long while. . . . Why? Did you like him?"

"He interested me. How much of that tale that Miss Etheredge told was true—you heard it, didn't you?"

"More or less. I don't know whether it was true. Most likely not. She's got her own way of looking at things. . . ."

"Yes, but there was something about the story that made it feel devilishly near being true. I can imagine a man being like that, depending on women to know himself, and frightened that they should know too much. . . . You don't know this Netta either?"

"No. . . . I've heard of *her*. That's all." There was a shade of embarrassment in Maurice's voice, when he asked, "What do you think of Etheredge?"

"She's extraordinary. I've never seen a woman like her. She bowls me over. . . . She comes clean outside my idea of a woman. One moment I thought what on earth is she doing, painting and messing about here; she ought to be mixed up in some terrific drama of the primitive

passions, wherever those things happen. But really it's just because she is mixed up with all this talking and painting that she is what she is."

"I think she's wonderful," said Maurice, as though he were assenting to Dennis's opinion.

"Let's have a drink. There's a café down by the river, I suppose."

"Dozens."

"Go to the best. There's no hurry. I'm not bursting for food, are you?—and I'm sure Anne's not."

At the bottom of the hill they turned into a café on the quay. Dennis ordered an absinthe. "I don't think I've ever asked for the stuff of my own free will before." Maurice followed suit.

"I didn't get very much out of the couple of letters you sent me," said Dennis, "but I gathered you've been having a good time."

"Yes, we did have a wonderful week. . . . Up to and including yesterday. I don't feel quite so cheerful now, though."

"It was not my arrival?"

"Good Lord, no! It must be going to the old places, seeing the old people. We haven't been this side of the river before—except one afternoon at the Zoo. . . . I've a curious, rotten feeling, that nothing's fixed. . . . I feel now that someone might come up behind me and take this overcoat off my back, suddenly—that it's not quite really there."

"Has Anne got the same feeling?"

"I don't think so." He paused to review the evidence of the day. "I don't know though. I shouldn't be surprised. These aren't her old places. But she may get it off me. Perhaps it's in the air. It may be just seeing Etheredge. She always has had that sort of effect on me."

"I can understand that."

" . . . You remember all I was saying to you in the hotel before Anne came in this afternoon—about being bursting to write, and get something done?" Dennis nodded.



"Well, that's all rot. I haven't got anything to say—nothing at all. The only thing that's any real good to me is another week like the last. I forgot myself completely. If I can't forget myself, I'm hopeless—like I am now. . . . I've an idea I've got the makings of a Wauchope in me."

"That's curious. . . . I've been thinking exactly the same—of myself."

"I wonder who's right. We can't very well both be. I'm not very much like you. . . . I wish to God, I'd managed to stand up to something. I think if I'd really seen something through, I might have been all right. . . . If I'd really done what I wanted to, without waiting to be frightened or ashamed. As it is I get a double dose. First I'm frightened and ashamed, then I'm frightened and ashamed for having been frightened and ashamed. . . . That kind of thing could go on for ever and ever like one of those things in algebra. I suppose the only reason that it doesn't is that people have to go to sleep sometimes. Just now I feel I should like to go to sleep all the while."

"Do you ever have the idea," Maurice went on, "that it would have been a damned sight better if you'd never been allowed to grow up—if you'd been stuck in some garden of Eden? There's a hell of a lot of truth in that story, I think. Here I am twenty-four, absolutely tortured by the thought of all the people there are roaming about the world, whom I've hurt in some way or in another. They give me the shudders when I think about them. Twenty-four—that's about four years, five at most, of effective life. What the devil will it be like when I'm forty-eight I wonder? The funniest part of it is that the reason why I hurt all these people is that I haven't got the courage not to. If I'd just told them that I was—well, just what I am—quite early on, it would have been all right. But I can never do that. Of course, it's bound to come out, sooner or later, and that's where the trouble begins. I believe they forget about it. I don't. . . . But even if I did tell them about myself at the beginning, they wouldn't

believe it—not a word. I can see myself telling my mother that I knew I was going to make a mess of everything. . . . No, there's nothing to be done."

"Except not make a mess of it," said Dennis.

Maurice looked at him with a disappointed surprise.

"You think that's rather cheap. I thought so myself before. We're both sentimentalists, of different kinds and degrees. But why not really be a sentimentalist—follow every sentimental impulse?"

"If you've got the strength to do that," said Maurice, "it seems to me you've got the strength not to be sentimental. I don't believe you are, yourself, anyhow."

"No—perhaps not," said Dennis thoughtfully.

"If I once begin to think about myself really, I can't see where my sentimentality stops. It's mixed up with everything I do, somehow. It's not only that I can't end anything, but I can't even believe that anything is going to end. At least I can believe it, I suppose, but I simply won't realise it. I don't dare to. For instance, when you go away again. You'll have to sometime, I suppose? I simply can't face the idea of saying good-bye to you, and yet I can't get it out of the back of my mind. That a thing should be over and done with for ever—it almost makes me freeze with horror. . . . Do you think Anne's like that?"

"Anne? Why do you ask me?"

"I only wondered."

"... My notion of her is that she's different. She's older. I think she's got an ideal. Perhaps that's what makes her so different from anyone else. If things don't come up to her ideal, she would let them go without a word. She always has a standard to judge things by. I'm sure of that. Whether it's an ideal that has never been realised, or whether it's some experience in the past, I can't say. That's my notion of her, anyhow. And I may be wrong. I don't pretend to understand her."

"Do you notice that she's changed at all—since we were in Sussex together?"

"I've hardly seen her. . . . She's so curiously sure of herself. Why, do you find she's changed?"

"She was wonderful last week. It isn't as though we did anything in particular. . . . I don't believe it's much good forgetting yourself. It lets you down with a crash. The funny part of it is that you don't know when you have been let down—not till sometime afterwards." He gulped down the rest of his absinthe. "Etheredge does take it out of you," he said.

They walked across the bridges home in silence.

"It's a quarter-past seven," said Dennis, as they entered the hotel. "If we're ready by eight that ought to give us plenty of time. I'll come to your sitting-room then. You tell Anne."

Anne lay on the couch in her bedroom. To Maurice's apprehensive vision there was something aloof and resigned in her attitude. She must be thinking her own thoughts alone. He had expected it, yet the reality was far more potent than the thing he had expected. He was afraid of Anne thinking her own thoughts apart from him, for thus, it seemed to him, she could see him more clearly. Close to her he was hidden. But thought and calculation vanished into impulse as he looked at her lying on the couch. He knelt on the floor beside her and held her tight in his arms, his face bent over hers.

"What's the matter, Anne?"

She raised herself slightly and looked straight into his eyes.

"Why, do I look as though anything were the matter?"

"I thought so. You do look different from what you did this morning."

"And so do you. . . . But I think I'm tired. . . ."

"Is that all really?"

"No. I've been thinking how very much I'm like Miss Etheredge, and wondering what it is that keeps me from being quite like her."

"How do you mean—like Etheredge?"



"When you're lonely, things turn—to dust and ashes. . . . I'm too old to be lonely."

"But you aren't lonely, are you?"

"Oh, no!" she said. "That's why I can talk so much about loneliness."

"Don't talk like that. . . . What about *me*?"

Anne made no reply by word. She looked at him so intensely, with a half-smile on her lips, that he felt that she had taken his words and flung them away. Suddenly, she clasped him about the neck, and kissed his face, passionately, feverishly. She sprang upon her feet and clasped him tumultuously again.

"That's over," she said. "Now for Montmartre."

She bent down before the mirror and rubbed her face, holding her big powder puff in her two hands like a towel.

While they were dressing, and Anne was still at the mirror, rouging her lips, she surprised him by saying, in little spasms of words, "*À Montmartre comme les Montmartroises*. . . . Miss Etheredge is everything. . . . That you told me and more. . . . But you never told me. . . . That she was in love with you. . . . Or had been. . . . That was curious."

Maurice was sharpening his razor. His face was thick with soap.

"Why is it curious?" he answered. "I never knew it."

"No," she said. ". . . I don't believe you would." After a long pause while she delicately pencilled her eyebrows, she returned with the rouge to her mouth. It might almost have been that she sought the staccato it gave to her words.

"But you do know now. . . . But it is rather strange. . . . Don't you think. . . . That all your tragedies . . . happen . . . while you're shaving . . .?" They turned together to face each other. The colour of Anne's black eyebrows and reddened lips made her strange to him.

"Why, you look quite different, Anne."

"*À Montmartre comme les Montmartroises*," she said again.

## CHAPTER V

THEY went up the generously carpeted stairs of the *Caboulot*. Dennis led the way. An obstinate determination had taken hold of him. It carried him unbending through a dispute with an unsatisfied cabdriver, which would at any other time have driven him to exasperation. Anne followed his long strides at a run, leaping lightly from one stair to another, laughing to herself, excited and irresponsible. She knew that her evident delight estranged Maurice, who kept pace with her; and she saw the nervous hunger in his eyes when he said to her, "You aren't so tired now?"; but she could not feel sorry for him. Her own flight was not steady enough to bear his weight. She was careful of her own exultation, for she knew it might easily be brought down. Instead of responding to the reproach in his words, she ran yet faster up the stairs before him, turning her head to say :

"No, I've forgotten all about that now."

A mildly obsequious *patron* led them through the white doors. The suddenness of sound was unexpected. It set Anne's wavering blood flowing riotously. She caught hold of Dennis's arm and laughed. He turned about at the touch and looked at her; a tightness in him, that had held his muscles fixed, loosened at the sight of Anne, and of the bright dancing-room. He smiled.

"Thank God we're here," he said.

The *patron* waited while they chose a table. Dennis could not attend to the choice. His wandering eyes vaguely watched two women, who danced, pressed close together, and brushed his coat with their skirts. One was

tall, with flaxen hair, dressed like a scarlet doll. She sang raucously but with enjoyment, as with quick decisive steps she backed before her partner down the room. The other, dark-haired, with a hooped dancing-skirt, leant her head sideways against her partner's bosom, and laughed for applause.

"If monsieur would only choose. . . ."

Dennis turned to consult Anne. She was gone to disrobe. "This will do, won't it?" he said to Maurice, and pointed to a table at the end of the room. "Anything," said Maurice.

They sat down and awaited Anne. Maurice idly regarded the waiter's hands as they prepared the table, and shivered a little. You had to be in the mood for this kind of thing, he thought. He shifted his chair to the side of the table so that he could see the room. The movement, the curious women, some few bored, but most, naturally breathing their natural air, began to interest him, yet he was completely outside it all. The noisy music of the red-coated players, the swirl of faces that he could not arrest, lulled his eyes and ears. He was glad to be there and to have something to look at. But he was out of it all, not definitely but uneasily, as though at any moment he might in part be carried away. He would have rejoiced had he thought he would be whirled into it wholly, if he could drink himself drunk enough to go away with the dark-haired dancing girl, who now sat sideways on a chair looking towards them, pouting and drumming with her toes on the floor, with a nonchalant gaiety that (so he assured himself) did not deceive him for a moment. He would be so kind towards her. It would be an unfamiliar experience for her. He knew he would never be drunk enough for that.

"We want something to drink, immediately," said Dennis, pointing out the champagne on the card.

"That's good," said Maurice. It was a good thing to drink anyhow. His glance rested upon the black-haired



girl. She looked thin and tired. That was only the colour on her eyes, of course, but it would be worth while to be her lover. She might be quite happy with him. It was silly that he could not do it just because he was in love with Anne. Why should it make any difference to that? If only something would happen and set him free, just for a little while, and he could come back to her afterwards. He did not dare to fix the thought, but he wished that something would happen.

"Here's Anne," said Dennis.

She seemed to be unfamiliarly tall and languid as she danced the last few steps towards the table. Her arms were covered tightly by the long sleeves of a white blouse that poured in a cascade of frill over her hands. She sat down quickly at Dennis's side and looked at Maurice, resting her chin upon her hands.

"I'm very happy," she said.

To Maurice her happiness was foreign; because it was foreign, he thought it was forced. He even detected a note of challenge in her words. The idea that they were completely apart swept into him like a cold and desolating mist. In Anne's eyes as they still regarded him he saw the knowledge of his own thoughts.

"I can't quite get used to you like that," he said.

"No?" she said indifferently, then she turned to Dennis.

"Am I so terribly unfamiliar?"

"You're different but perfectly recognisable," he replied, and stared as he had been staring at the far end of the room, where in a pause of the music a woman with a shock of red hair, in a dead black-coat and skirt, danced an amazing *pas seul*. Her concentration upon her performance seemed occasionally to snap, and her tenseness to escape in sudden low hoots of hard laughter.

"I think she's wonderful," said Anne. She drained her glass of champagne. The music began again, quick American music of the modern sort. It fired Dennis with a sudden determination. "Let you and I dance, Anne."

She stood up and waited for him while he drank. "Order supper," he said to Maurice.

For all his determinations, Dennis was not ungraceful. The discipline he put upon himself was not apparent in his movements, which, though heavy, were yet measured. He held Anne lightly. Her eyes were shut while she sang the words to the American tune, and her whole body swayed.

"I wish to God I could lose myself like you," said Dennis to her.

Anne opened her eyes and looked up at him, and smiled so that Dennis wondered whether she had lost herself after all.

"I shall have to get drunk," he said.

Anne nodded, too preoccupied with the rhythm of her body to speak. A blonde-bearded man, dancing grotesquely like a clumsy wooden doll, collided with them, and smiled enthusiastically by way of apology. With him he dragged the red-haired girl. Her head was thrown back, and it swayed mechanically to her movements. Her eyes were shut and she looked sick.

"Don't you think she's wonderful?" said Anne.

"I hate the man," he replied. Then he was disgusted at his own sentimental concern. What was it to do with him if the blonde-bearded man was abominable? Then the music made a pleasant rushing noise in his ears, and he was plunged forgetful into the sense that he and Anne were dancing together.

Maurice watched them. He admired and envied them for dancing well. He looked round to see if anybody else was admiring Anne. She was very beautiful. She swayed like the slender leaf of a water plant beneath the stream. What on earth had he to do with her now? She had stepped clean out of him and left him empty; he shrank back, collapsed, into himself. There was nothing of himself except a few recollections, of Madeleine, of Etheredge, of Anne. He began to wonder what Madeleine felt about

him now. He remembered how she had sat in the window of her room sewing and had suddenly said : " Je crois que tu ne m'aimes pas," and how he had protested, how he had wondered how a man would protest if he were really in love.

He ordered supper as he had been told. It was somehow pleasant to realise that it would cost a great deal of money. He had fairly bought his right to be there, and he need feel no obligation to become part of the entertainment, to do anything else than sit still there and watch. It was worth while to watch, too. He was not at all miserable, for all that he felt himself alone. He even enjoyed the warmth of the little gushes of sentimental recollection which burst into his mind.

The girl in the blue hooped skirt rose from her chair and came towards him. He saw her come, but the idea that she was coming to him never shaped itself, so remote was he, and it was with a little start of surprise that he heard her say, as she sat down on a chair beside the table :

" Monsieur is sad."

He looked at her. If her eyes were dead beneath their artificial lustre, her mouth was plainly alive, thin, undecided and human. Of course, she did not mean anything by the words, but all the same he thrilled to the expression of a casual sympathy.

" Life is sad, alas, madame," he said, and as he watched his fingers flick the ash off his cigarette into the tray, he smiled, not merely at his own sententiousness, but in delight at her sympathy. He knew what she would say next. It was always disappointing, but then it was her business to consume champagne at an inordinate profit to the management. It was his duty at least to anticipate the question she could have no pleasure in asking.

" If madame would do us the pleasure. . . ."

" Monsieur is not alone then. . . . Why is he sad ? "

" Aren't you ever sad, then, when you aren't alone ? "

" Never," she said decidedly, and drank the glass of champagne he poured for her, in emphasis of her denial.



"I don't believe it."

"Si, si—but certainly monsieur is in love. He has the appearance. Then there are sadnesses, I know. Above all, seeing monsieur is so *gentil*."

Maurice knew that she said the same thing, every night, in the ordinary way of business, but the knowledge was inactive. He believed that he really was *gentil*, and he was pleased to accept the tribute.

Anne and Dennis broke off their dance, though the music resumed at the insistent demand of the raucous pink doll. She danced with a young man, whose thin body and pale sallow face, beautifully framed with dead-black hair, made him look taller than he was. At his partner's vociferous "Bis!" he smiled, cynical and indulgent. He laughed outright towards a woman who smoked and watched him continually, when the flaxen-haired doll cried to the *chef d'orchestre*—"But my baby wishes to dance again, is it not so?"

The *chef d'orchestre* was deferential then. "If monsieur wishes it. . . ." And the tune—Alexander's Rag-time Band—poured out again.

"Morry's got someone to talk to," said Dennis, as they approached the table.

"So I see," said Anne. She greeted the girl. Anne felt that they were very near to each other, the girl and she.

"Monsieur and madame are friends?" she said, joining Anne to Maurice by her glance. "Then we must change places."

She made her way for Anne to sit on the cushioned seat against the wall. Dennis sat next to Anne. The girl sat in a chair beside Dennis.

"That's better, isn't it?" she said to Dennis. "I was saying," she went on, "that monsieur looked very sad. Evidently it was because you were not here, madame."

Anne laughed. "So you think that was the reason?"

She nodded. "Madame is beautiful and *gentil*. Monsieur is *gentil*. . . ."

"But not beautiful?" interrupted Maurice.

"Si, si." She looked at him critically. "He is beautiful, is he not, madame?"

"Yes, I think so." Anne also looked at him critically. For no reason he wished she had decided against him.

"But naturally you think so," said the girl.

"It's too simple altogether," said Anne.

They began to eat. They were hungry, and the food was excellent. Maurice had chosen it on a simple scheme. He had ordered the most expensive dish in every course. He wanted to spend money, superabundantly to pay his footing there. Moreover, to him poised uneasily between the past and the future in a present to which he was wholly strange, the spending of money came as a positive activity, justifying him. Save that he had had a suspicion that the waiter would see through his method, he had enjoyed its exercise.

"Is monsieur another who is sad?" said the girl to Dennis.

"Unfortunately, he doesn't know himself." Dennis's French was of the square English kind, plain and intelligible, but violent and disconcerting.

"That must be a terrible sadness," said the girl seriously.

"Or terribly amusing. . . ."

The girl supped her St. Germain with application. "You find it so? I don't think I should. I like to know about myself. I always know whether I'm sad or happy."

Dennis was drinking quickly and his words became brusque.

"Tell me now, are you sad or happy, now—quite frankly."

"But naturally . . .," she began.

"No 'naturally,'" he said. "One is never 'naturally' happy or sad. That's only politeness." Dennis glanced at Anne, and took hold of the girl's wrist on the table. "Tell me now, quite honestly." Dennis looked at Anne while he waited for the answer. Anne watched the girl.

"I think," she said quietly, "I should be really happy if monsieur were not hurting my hand."

Dennis let go of her wrist quickly. "I wasn't thinking. You must forgive me. It was brutal." Suddenly he raised her wrist and bent his head forward. He kissed the faint red mark his fingers had left, lowered her hand to the table and drank again.

The girl laughed delightedly. "Monsieur est bien gentil," she said and looked for Anne's assent.

"I assure you, mademoiselle," said Anne, "it's the first time he's ever done such a thing, at least since I have known him."

"Is that true?" the girl asked Maurice. He nodded his head. "Is that true?" she turned to Dennis.

"Perhaps. I don't know. . . . Probably. . . ."

"Then, kiss me." She held up her face to him. Maurice watched the tautness of her slender arms as she clenched the chair-seat with her hands. He would never have dared to kiss her, or be kissed by her in front of Anne. Only because he was too much the coward. What difference could it make? Why couldn't he be free? Of course he would come back eventually to Anne; but now he desired to kiss that girl, to be her lover, only for a night. Then he would pass on. What if he did? It wouldn't change him, save that he would have been honest. But Anne! He did not know. Perhaps she would be hurt, and not have him back again. Perhaps she would not take any notice. He found that he wanted her to take notice. There was something terribly unfair in that—to want her to take notice, and yet to receive him back as though she had taken none. Still, there it was. If that was unfair he was unfair. But did he want her to receive him back? Perhaps he himself would not go back, of his own choice would not go back. Yes, that was the truth of the matter. He wouldn't go back. . . . He was pulled up by a queer inward shock. . . . Why wasn't the idea terrible to him? It ought to be terrible, and it was not terrible at all. Quite plainly he could see



himself deciding not to return. . . . He musn't let Anne know that.

He slowly raised his glass and held it between his eye and the light, curious to know whether his hand trembled. It trembled a little.

"Anne, I want to drink your health," he said, filling her glass and his own. While they touched glasses, she looked at him.

"What are you thinking about, Anne?" he said when they had drunk.

"I was wondering," she said, "why we're all here instead of anywhere else."

"Why, where would *you* rather be?"

"I was wondering about that, too."

"What was it you said, Anne?" asked Dennis.

"I only wanted to know why we are all here, rather than anywhere else. . . . Apart from the fact that you've invited us."

"Because it's the kind of place where you can forget that you've lost your courage. . . . That's why I'm here, anyhow." He laughed at himself. "My God, but I'm being terribly heavy. It's the first stage, when I've drunk too much. . . . When one drinks, one becomes serious, isn't that so, mademoiselle?"

"That is true," she said.

"Please don't agree with me unless you really want to. I don't mind."

"No . . . but it's true all the same . . . one must drink more, that's all." She filled up Dennis's glass for him. "I want to dance. Madame and I will dance the next together? It's more *gentil* when two ladies dance together. I think so."

"I should like to," said Anne. "But are you never sad, like monsieur?" She nodded towards Dennis.

"Never sad like monsieur," she said decidedly, shaking her head and speaking with the rim of the glass between her lips.

"But what do you do when your lover leaves you?"

"Then I weep—tears—but I'm not sad like monsieur."

The orchestra burst into another American dance, tumultuous, noisy, but with some faint echo of the melancholy lilt of the music whence it came. The girl stood up quickly and moved her doubled fists in impatient delight.

"This is admirable," she said.

Maurice and Dennis watched them. The hoop of the girl's blue skirt stuck out ridiculously high behind her, as Anne held her close. Now Anne's dancing seemed to be the full completion of her walk. Because her whole body moved in rhythm, it was as though her feet moved not at all. She might have remained on the spot where she stood and yet she would have been dancing still. The girl seemed to partake of a common rapture. In Anne's arms she was soft and languid, dancing in a dream that might have had no end. She leant her head against Anne's shoulders and closed her eyes, pressing nearer and nearer to her. The lids fell half-way down over Anne's own eyes, bent down towards the girl's black hair. In her nostrils she felt nothing but the pungent sweet smell of oranges that rose from the hair that scattered over her bosom. The noisy, monotonous music sped distances away. A glare of white and yellow and red filtered dimly through her lashes. The girl's soft body melted into the instinctive rhythm of her own.

"Do your lovers leave you often?" she asked naturally, almost unconsciously. For Anne they might have continued to talk together thus, for ever.

"I have had very few lovers, madame." The words faded unechoed into the full silence of the dance.

"Perhaps monsieur is going to leave you and you are sad." The girl shifted her head on Anne's shoulder as she spoke.

"I don't know. Perhaps," said Anne.

"All that is nothing. Ça pique pour un petit moment, C'est tout."

"This is better." Anne held her tight.

"When a man can leave you, it's better he should leave you immediately. C'est bien moins de misère."

"Perhaps it is different for you. You are not so lonely as I."

"Moi, je ne suis pas seule. J'ai un petit—un beau petit gosse. Mais c'est triste d'être toute seule. Ça vous énerve."

Anne felt that the whole world had dropped away from them as they danced. She might say anything, do anything, be anything, if only the dance went on. The thought that it should stop was incredible. Then a vision of the girl's *beau petit gosse* loomed ridiculous before her. The thought was so incongruous then and there that she laughed derisively at herself. She waited quite calmly for the music to end, dancing still, her eyes now fixed on the blue hoop that waved like a monstrous heavy tail; she was amused by the sight and wholly herself.

"But of course monsieur is not going to leave me at all. It was only a *blague*. You made me drunk."

"But it's beautiful to be drunk like that, with dancing."

The two men watched them. Into the whirl of yearnings and indecisions which worked beneath Dennis's natural control a hard vein of resolution slowly spread. For a moment he had desired the girl. But he desired all women, and since the desire was vague, it faded. Now he needed her, not for the satisfaction of desire, which passed easily and unregrettably away, but to arrest his fluctuant self. In her he could assert himself against the tumult of instinct and impulse which beset him. To go away with her, to treat her as any one of the thousand men he saw and detested in their traffic with women, under Anne's eyes, under the eyes of that tempestuous and accusing soul which took shape sometimes in Anne, but more often strangely in the tremulous sneering lips of Miss Etheredge, that would justify him to himself, prove him a man able to steer by his own star. The purpose hardened within him as his eyes firmly followed their dance. The girl was



Anne's now ; but she would have to come with him, have to come into the power of his money. It was the idea of compulsion and brutality upon which he fastened. He would rather she came against her will than liking him. The more she seemed to lose herself in the dreamy intoxication of her dance with Anne, the more the joy of his secret determination glowed beneath him. He followed her every movement. His glance passed from her slender yellow arms to the head which she pillowed as though in sleep on Anne's breast. He felt her little body shrink under his touch ; he saw her eyes open in a childish stare of horror.

"Do you like that girl ? " he asked Maurice.

Maurice had heard Anne's question to the girl, "What do you do when your lovers leave you ? " and had been slowly pondering its significance. It was significant, that he knew. Whether to Anne, he did not know.

"Yes," he said to Dennis. "She's so complete. . . . They both seem to be miles away . . . in another world."

"It's a good thing to meet one of these women that you needn't pity."

"You couldn't pity her. I can't—and I can pity anybody. . . . She might rather pity me."

"I think she's afraid of me."

"Do you ? . . . She seems to have taken to Anne."

"She makes them, somehow. . . . She ought not."

"Ought not ? . . . What do you mean ? "

"They've no business to take to anybody, except one of themselves. . . . It's better for them. If you have to be animal, stay an animal. . . . There's nothing wrong in being an animal. I'm not sure it's not the right thing ; but to try to be both—it only hurts. Think what a shock she'll have when I go home with her and pay the money—me after Anne."

While he spoke Dennis looked at the pair. The music twice repeated, ended suddenly. The girl woke out of her dream. Taking Anne's hand she made her way back to

the table. She put a cigarette in her mouth and leant languidly with her arms upon the table to take the light which Dennis made for her.

"It is not every day one dances like that," she said. "It is different with men, but Madame dances as a lover."

Anne stood up at the table and smiled at the words, as she might smile in the full recollection of sunny dreams, poised between sleep and wakefulness. To Maurice she was foreign. He did not notice, as he had, the unfamiliar colour on a familiar Anne; now the colour and Anne were one, and both strange to him. He did not wonder at it, but merely saw with his eyes and painfully accepted. His mind was busy with Dennis's declared intention. So decisive was it and unexpected. Envy followed his surprise, inevitably.

At a table in front of him the red-haired girl sat with her head thrown perilously back. Her eyes were shut and her mouth opened uncertainly. Her long hair, escaped from its band, streamed loose over the chair-back. The blonde-bearded man was laughing in front of her. In the middle of the room, stood the tall, sallow man with his wig of jet-black hair. So black were his clothes and so white the light which poured upon them, that he seemed to waver between the poles of colour, to come into definite being out of nothingness, and to pass as quickly back again, like a picture seen on a background of closed eyes. He was singing a loud high-pitched song, seriously, while he drew his tall body up and made stilted gestures with the flattened palm of his hand. The *patron*, curly-haired, with a red, sunken face, like an American of caricature without his beard, paused in his ministrations to hear. A girl in an orange dress like a Russian peasant's, with high dancing boots, leant, hands in pockets, against the partition by the door. She moved her head from time to time to free the black hair that curled into the nape of her neck. Beyond her, many girls, topped by the scarlet doll, delightfully waited. At the long border of full tables round the room

everyone seemed to be silent for the song. The pale-faced woman of many pearls who had watched the man while he danced, watched him still. Her elbows rested still on the table, and the long cigarette still trailed smoke before her face. The man's dead-black head rose yet higher, like a mask upon his firm-lined face. Some ice tinkled musically in a bucket. Then the red-haired girl in front of Maurice jolted her head forward and laughed, harsh and loud. The *patron* frowned and listened on. The blonde-bearded man, smiling, laid his hand on the girl's arm. She waked into bewilderment, then whispered raucously to him so that Maurice could hear, "Je suis un vrai type, moi." The man nodded assent; and the song ascended still.

The bravos and bises sounded hollow. They could not conquer the silence into which they were launched. Long minutes of empty fixity seemed to pass before the *patron* moved and the *chef d'orchestre* raised his violin.

"It is a little *polisson*. Madame did not understand? It isn't important. He sings everywhere. . . . La grande en perles—elle est Russe—est diablement amoureuse de lui; mais il s'en f . . . de tout le monde. Il est gentil tout de même. Il dit des fortunes, très bien, avec des cartes, pour rien. Celle-là"—she nodded discreetly towards the red-haired girl—"elle s'ensaoûle tous les soirs. Ça vous dégoûte peut-être, Madame . . . mais elle est malade."

"Anne, dance with me, will you?" said Maurice.

She was surprised. "I thought you didn't dance. . . ."

"I can a little. If it worries you, we'll stop."

"Madame dances with monsieur. Then I must dance with *le bête*." She laughed at Dennis. "But the next is for us again, is it not, Madame?"

The interminable rag-time struck up again. Anne put her hands on his shoulders and leant back away from him, moving her head slowly from side to side. By the simple throwing back of herself, she was swept clean away from him. He moved anxiously with her. The *chef d'orchestre*, dodging dexterously among the dancers, swinging his



fiddle high and low to avoid them, might have been jeering at him. Why had he danced? Not because he desired to . . . why? He saw Dennis moving grave and indifferent with the girl pressed close to him. The tall, sallow man swung superbly past him, smiling inscrutably beyond the pearly lady. He looked at his hands on Anne's outstretched arms, then down the empty space between them to the floor where their feet moved like distant ordered planets. If only some thrill of love, of conquering desire, would pass between them. Anne's throat lay beautiful before him. He would like to kiss it. Like? The gulf between it and the desire that would justify it was broad as the space between them. Like? His futility seemed to concentrate in the thought. The hoop of the blue skirt touched his arm. He glanced round, and she grimaced at him.

Anne opened her eyes. "Don't let's dance any more," she said.

His determination collapsed at the words, and he followed her back to the table.

"Why did you ask me?" she said. "You didn't want to."

"I know I didn't. . . . I was jealous. . . ."

"Jealous? Of what?"

"I don't know. . . ." A sudden flame caught in him. "Oh! What the hell am I doing here?" It died down instantly. "I don't know anything," he said clearly, "about it or myself or anything. I'm tired and sick of it. If only . . ."

"If only what?"

"If only . . . No, I don't know . . . but there is an 'if only' about me somewhere to-night. . . . You seem to have gone right away and left me alone. . . . That's why I wanted to dance."

"But you want to be left alone, don't you? Tell me."

"There are different ways of being left alone."

One half of him cried out to him to fall at Anne's feet in

utter abandonment. Thus he would have been rid of his burden. But something remained to tell him that he had done it too often, that Anne, too, was weary of that. It held him fast and shaped his resolution to something which he did not know.

"Anne," he said with a curious decision, "I'm very sorry about that. It's being in between sober and drunk, or it may be something else. It's very hard to tell, but, at all events, I've got rid of it. . . . But I don't think I'll dance any more. . . . I've an idea," he said, after a few moments, "that it has something to do with Etheredge. I never can tell how much she affects me; but it's something considerable. Does a woman feel like that about her? . . . but I can't say exactly what it is that she does."

"She gives me a kind of determination about myself, I think," said Anne.

"I think it is the opposite with me."

"Yes, I can see that." Anne turned away to face the girl, who was arranging her rebellious skirt in the chair. "He was nice to dance with?"

"Not bad. Much better than I thought. I believe he loves me a little." As he climbed down into his seat, she looked up at him with an inexperienced shyness. Her fingers, holding the spoon to eat her ice, were square and babyish, with a baby's wire ring. "It's pretty, isn't it?" she said, and placed it in the middle of the table for general admiration. Herself, she looked at it with her head cocked sideways and the tip of her tongue showing from the corner of her mouth. "I got it at Christmas in a *baraque*. I paid two sous and won first time."

Dennis took the hand and kissed it; then, as though the action were one, he caught the girl by the shoulders from her chair and set her beside him. She shrank together, and looked up at him with a childish surprise. She was frightened by him, and yet attracted. She put her arms round his neck quickly and said, "You won't be rough with me, will you—mon grand bête?" With a shy and nervous

smile she turned to Anne. "You're not angry with me, madame?" Her arms were still about Dennis's neck, and her head rested against his breast.

"But why should I be angry?" said Anne. "I am very fond of you." A note in Anne's voice that was hardly sure bore witness to her truth. Dennis's arm slowly encircled the girl's waist. His eyes were fixed on Anne.

"We must dance then," said the girl suddenly, putting Dennis's arm away. Anne rose at the words. Close-pressed, they moved into the music.

The girl's head nestled familiar upon Anne's shoulder. While they danced she spoke but once. "He is *gentil*, your friend, *le grand bête*?"

Anne woke out of the dance and looked at him at the far end of the room before she answered. Dennis was watching them, and listening to something that Maurice was saying.

"Yes, he is *gentil*, truly *gentil*."

The girl, whose eyes had been turned up to look for her reply, nestled close again, like a child reassured before sleep, to whom one single word can bring contentment. The movement of her head again set free the pungent, sweet smell of her hair, like oranges. But always in Anne's eyes, while she danced, was the large blue tail, outspread and swinging.

Dennis was strange. His strangeness occupied Maurice's mind.

"I've never known you like this before," he said.

"Perhaps you never will again. . . . I imagine it's not the kind of thing that will often happen to me."

"To fall in love with a woman?"

Dennis looked at him. His lips twisted in a half-smile.

"Yes, that's it."

"What do you mean? It's happened often enough to you, surely?"

"You say you've never known me like this before. Neither have I. . . . It's curious how fast things do happen,



isn't it? Last night reading Tout-Paris in the boat-saloon: to-night, well, I'm not sure what I'm doing. Nobody knows quite. Anne doesn't; you don't; and I'm certain this girl doesn't . . . girl . . . I suppose she's as old as me . . . older than you, anyhow. . . . That's really the reason why I wanted to come here, after all—so that I shouldn't know what I was doing. I've succeeded pretty well, pretty well. . . .

“I wonder now why I'm going home with this woman. It would be something, quite definitely something, if I knew that. One thing is certain. It's not because I want her. I've wanted hundreds of women before—women of the same kind. I can't tell whether it's just vanity—the will to power. There's a good deal in that idea of the will to power. . . . Only it's a curious way of showing it, considering that that blonde-bearded fool in front of you there can get just as much power for the same amount of money. Probably more power for his money. . . . Perhaps I'm doing it to spite myself. That's a rotten kind of motive, according to my ideas, but it is fairly strong.”

All the while he watched the patterns he drew with a spoon upon the tablecloth. “Perhaps it's because I'm a little drunk, but since I got drunk on purpose we needn't count that. I mean, I got drunk on purpose to carry it off with some thoroughness. This is good stuff to drink too much of, isn't it? Twenty-eight francs a bottle. I should think that was about two hundred and fifty per cent profit. It is rather strange that should make it so much better to drink. . . . Anyhow, it's the kind of night that I ought to be drinking stuff that gives the *patron* two hundred and fifty per cent. It justifies me somehow, or do you not feel that?”

Maurice nodded and listened. He was surprised that Dennis was watching the dancers now, while he continued to speak.

“Funny things do flit across one's mind. . . . About

love. There must be something in it. They've turned out quite a lot of poetry about it, quite good, too. Do you think it's peculiar to temperaments? You know 'Vivamus, mea Lesbia atque amemus!' It couldn't have come out of the same thing that that blonde-bearded b . . . feels about that woman there in front of you, could it? Not the kind of thing you spend a few years in constructing either. I can see yellow-hair's argument all right, myself. I had two seconds of it with the blue girl yonder. . . . Perhaps it was Catullus's kind, though. I've grown too old, or I was born too old, for that.

"There's the problem. Does that finish the business, or is there another kind beyond all this—the Dante—Beatrice love? Am I just stuck in between them, or is the ideal only a plant? . . . People seem to get along without it, anyhow. . . . What's strange in me is that I can't believe it really is a plant; and yet I can't conceive it truly existing. What's the good of it existing if it does not exist for a man like me? How can it exist for a man who is eternally conscious of himself, as I am? . . . You have to lose yourself. . . . He that loseth his life shall save it. I feel that that's true. But what's the good of a feeling to a man with my habit of mind? Lose myself? If I just suggest it to myself nine-tenths of me gets up and laughs. . . .

"No, I believe that there is one way of salvation for me: to do something instead of letting something be done, to do something and wait, something that makes you bound to respond, somehow to baptise myself. You see what I mean. The doing of something that may have no value in itself, but which costs me so much to do that it will always be a symbol—that is what I come to. . . . What a devil of a time this dance is! . . . or am I talking quickly . . . ? Perhaps I'm after crucifying myself with the blue girl. That's strange, too—how one comes back to the old symbols. I wonder whether they meant as much then as they do to me now."

Dennis talked on aloud to himself in dispassionate monotone. While Maurice listened the bright lights of the room swam in a changing grey that leapt from black to white as had the shape of the tall singer while he sang. Music boomed about his ears, and the dancers blurred unwearied paths before his eyes. He must be drunk, he thought. An intensity of remembrance, that took neither shape nor name nor time, flooded into the channels of his hungry sense. He could not wait to probe the mystery of recollection. He was urgent to follow Dennis, who was passing beyond him, and he despaired at his earthbound spirit that would not rise.

"Not to know what to-morrow will bring forth. I do know. I know that I shall remain within my boundaries and refuse myself to everything from fear. We can't go on living like that. I know the shape of myself from one year's end to another. Now I feel I'm imprisoned in it, and I must burst outside somehow. To make yourself incalculable. It may be only an ideal. . . . The blue girl would be frightened if she knew she had to help me do that. I'm frightened myself. Not to know what I shall be—I should be frightened of that, if I didn't know it will never come true. It's all just putting up an argument against Destiny, an argument instead of a challenge. How the psychologists would laugh to hear me talk of challenging my own self, making myself be other than I am. . . . But they only babble after all, and I can babble their own things better than they can. I've made a decent living by it for years. I thought that might be a symbol if I gave it up; but it means nothing. It doesn't touch me. I want something that will touch me. I shall always be myself, but now my self is smaller than I am. I hate it. I'm dead tired of it. I want the thing that hates and is tired to join with the thing I hate. They might make a job of it, they might . . . It is a problem, isn't it?"

Maurice heard the words in a daze, through which he tried to grope after the sense which he felt they had for



Dennis. His mind refused the quest, and obstinately shaped to other things, to clear recurrent pictures of past moments with Etheredge and with Madeleine, to visions of a secure, untroubled Maurice—an ideal of himself so concrete that he might have welcomed the imagined Maurice as a friend who would understand. He was present too in certain moments of the past, and his presence seemed to hold the past together with the future. In both he was possessed by a kind of innocence, which conveyed no meaning to Maurice save in the pictures he saw.

Anne and the girl had come back from the dance. Dennis was silent, until the girl looked at him carefully and said :

“Here is another who is sad. You are sad, too, grand bête ?”

“It’s not sadness. I’m always like this, I assure you.”

She looked incredulously at him and shook her head.

“You are funny. I don’t understand you.”

He leant his cheek on his hand. The pressure twisted his lip into a crooked smile.

“What is it you don’t understand ?”

“You change so quickly. Sometimes you look—cruel, and sometimes you look as though someone were hurting you. . . . Perhaps you hurt yourself,” she added sagely.

“But you love me, don’t you, grand bête ?”

“I ask myself,” he replied, as one really pondering.

“Perhaps. I don’t know.”

“Then you do love me,” she said, with triumphant conviction. She jumped up from the chair and sat in the cushioned seat beside him.

The last dance had fatigued Anne. While her excited breathing calmed, she sat still and pale, looking down at her hands that lay languid on the table. Indifferent to what passed about her, weary of the familiar aspect of Maurice’s eyes, that were always apprehensive of discovery, she pressed the blood into her finger-nails, striving vaguely to account for her weariness. The still suspense of waiting had weakened her. She had for so long been endeavouring

to hold herself in poise, neither too eager nor reluctant in response to that which confronted her, in the desperate knowledge that were she to topple from her poise she would fall beyond recovery. It seemed to her that unless she maintained herself on this narrow edge the stream of life would pass her by. She held by some deep instinct of right and wrong, but never till then had the burden of the right been so heavy. She would gladly suffer the waters to pass over her, she thought, while she gazed through dim lashes at the fast vanishing blood under her nails. She had played for something too high for her, and had not foreseen the cost. She had too arduously controlled herself to some end that sped away in smoke. Her own fatalism aroused her unquiet expectation. She only had the courage to expect little of life when she expected much, to believe things would never happen again when she believed a better thing was in store for her. She thought of Maurice, and she seemed inwardly to smile at her own prophetic soul. It was strange how all plans, all foreknowledge, failed her at the last. She thought of Miss Etheredge, who seemed so close to her. She was very old.

She heard the words that the girl spoke to Dennis. They were so serious and childishly profound. "When one does not know, then one loves." She was born into the belief that Anne had tried to acquire. How far they were away from each other! Anne wondered whether it was the distance between youth and age. She could cry over the girl in blue, with the scent of oranges in her hair. She was very near to crying, even while she answered her questions: whether Anne thought that she could wear a black hat with a yellow feather. She had seen it that afternoon, when she got up early to look at the shops. It was an indubitable *occasion* at fifteen francs. Whether it was good or bad to have little square nails like hers. Marcelle—the girl with Russian boots—had told her they were *démodé*. They compared hands, and Anne was warned that it was dangerous to have a broken line of life. Yes,

Anne could have cried over her—she did not know whether it would have been over her—but she could not dance with her any more.

“I think I’m going now,” she said. “Would you like to stay?” she asked Maurice. He was eager to go. Trusting to her incomprehensible English she said aloud that he was to give Dennis fifty francs to give to the girl from her.

Dennis looked up. “Don’t worry about the money now. I’ll do it. We can settle up afterwards. I am paying for everything else.”

“Don’t forget,” said Anne.

“Madame is going?” said the girl, disappointed.

“I feel so tired.”

“You got up very early perhaps?”

“At eight in the morning.”

“Al—ors. . . .” Anne was relieved that she found the explanation so complete. “*Mais le grand bête reste avec moi ?*”

Anne answered for Dennis. “*Naturellement.*”

“Je suis content,” she said, looking up at him, then at Anne, and swinging her legs from the cushioned seat.

While Maurice waited on the landing the girl said good-bye to Anne in the ladies’ room. She kissed Anne on the mouth, and Anne was glad to be kissed. “You will remember me sometimes, is it not so, Madame?”

Anne and Maurice went down the stairs together. They saw the girl in blue leaning over the banisters and waving to them, after the sound of the music had died finally away.

In the cab, as they drove home together, Maurice felt something of Anne’s silent weariness. He wanted to approach her, although he knew that his approach would not penetrate past her silence or dissipate her weariness. He would only be acting again, and she would know it only too well; he could not bring himself to do that again, and make himself utterly worthless in her eyes. But against his strained resolution warred an instinct. He was afraid



of Anne silent and weary. Thus the last bond that held him to a being who loved him was broken. He was perilously and terribly alone. But he could not attempt to approach close to her. His very fingers were hypocrites as they sought for her hand and rested uneasily upon it. Yet the silence in which the last ground crumbled under his feet was not to be borne. He must say something, even though his words and her answer were only sounds that would fill the void between them as they were spoken. He was not desperate, nor excited; only he seemed instinctively to react to her silence. It left him alone and empty, and he could not bear to be finally alone.

"I didn't think Dennis would stay behind with that girl. . . . It's not a practice of his. But as far as I can make out he's queer to-night. He was talking to me a lot while you were dancing. I didn't understand it all. I couldn't listen. But he has an idea of symbolic regeneration." He tapped with the window-strap upon his hand bent forward.

"It is strange," said Anne, ". . . in some ways . . . and then again it doesn't seem to me strange at all. . . . It might even be that the world will stop to-night. . . ."

"Oh . . . the world never does stop. Men and women do, that's all. Perhaps Dennis is stopping to-night."

"Perhaps . . . but it isn't everybody can stop . . . only those that are moving. But then to move may only be a habit that it's best to get out of. . . . Dennis may have come to that conclusion. It's not very far from anybody, until they are old and full of pity and at peace. . . . But to look for forgetfulness isn't a sure way of finding it, I suppose. Dennis would know that . . . I think that I should like above all other things a window on to the world. It might make all the difference, if the painful things were only curious and pitiful."

"Is Dennis painful, then?"

"I wasn't thinking of Dennis."

The quiet tinkling of the bell in the hotel door was

forlorn and solitary to Anne. A momentary wave of rushing, painful blood pressed about her temples as she climbed the stairs. Her slow, thoughtful talking in the cab had repressed the ferment, and now that her thoughts had escaped her control, it raged stormily back again. She held on to the stair-rail. Maurice stopped and took her by the elbow.

"Is anything the matter?"

"I'm afraid I drank too much champagne. . . . It's all right now. . . . It was as though my forehead were on fire. . . . I shall be asleep in a moment."

Anne undressed quickly. "I need to sleep," she said.

Maurice lay beside her thinking. He was sure that his busy brain would not let him sleep. It was ghastly to lie there together, when they weren't really together at all.

"It's funny how much will happen in a day," he said aloud, ". . . after last week. . . ."

Anne made no reply. He saw that her eyes were closed, and wondered whether she was really asleep. He would have understood so well if it had been only pretence. He turned away from her full of sobbing thoughts that sank into drowsiness. He felt Anne's arm steal over his shoulder. She must be sleeping, he decided, and himself slept.

## CHAPTER VI

WHEN Anne first woke the daylight had faintly begun callously to disclose the disorder of the room. She glanced under half-raised lids at the litter of clothes upon the chairs and the chaos of her dressing-table, then closed her eyes and lay still. Incessant thoughts, hybrids of truth and vain imagination, started on flight within her mind and fell, like new-fledged birds, grotesquely to the ground. In her wakeful sleep she smiled at her own languid impotence to control or impel them. Maurice's hand lay warm upon her breast, and she gently covered it with her own. Had there been no smile upon her lips one would have thought that her gesture was of pain. The smile slowly relaxed and her firm underlip drooped a little, while she pressed his hand yet closer to her breast. She was very sad, and so weak before her sadness that she yielded almost with relief. It wrapped her completely about, and in its embrace she passed into a light sleep.

She woke again when Maurice jumped out of bed suddenly, as abruptly roused by a voice. She heard him wash, and turned with open eyes to watch him. Though he had been noisy enough in his movements, he was surprised when he faced her quiet observation.

"I must go out," he said. "Last night . . . it's upset me . . . it's silly to drink so much. I'll walk it off."

"Yes," she said.

"Do *you* feel all right?"

"I don't know. I haven't had time to feel."

"You don't *look* very fine." Her face pillowed upon her hands, her brown eyes open wide, of which he could not tell whether they were dumb with pain or not yet awakened, made him uneasy.



"Perhaps I'm not used to it," she said. She longed to call to him not to go. In the breast upon which his warm hand had lain an ache of sudden loneliness seemed to have become material. With her teeth she held her lip and a cruel contempt of herself possessed her, as one betrayed into knowledge of unknown deeps of weakness in his soul.

"You're going to Etheredge this afternoon, aren't you, Anne?" He knotted his tie before the mirror and his back was turned to her.

"Yes . . . I suppose so," she said slowly.

"And we're dining with Ramsay to-night. . . . You don't mind my going out now, do you? Or would you rather I stayed?" He was putting on his coat. If he did not make haste to go he would not go at all, he thought, and he was impatient to be out of the room.

"It will do you good," she said. "To stay here suits me better."

He did not believe her words, but they were there and sufficient for him. He had waked with a resolution which obsessed him. It might have been slowly crystallising into form during his hours of sleep, so that he was shaped, when he awoke, by one definite and dominant plan. He must not, at whatever cost, must not go back on what had happened last night. While he dressed under Anne's eyes his decision sensibly weakened. He strove to hold himself rigid like a man who faces long contemplated physical pain, and to force a new strength into his resolution by repeating in his mind: "I must not, I *must* not."

He stood, ready to depart, in the middle of the room, as though he was deliberating.

"I think I'll go and see that man Boissonier," he said. "He's at St. Cloud. The ride will be long enough to blow my headache away." It was, indeed, to have been expected that his head should ache.

He went to the bed and leaned over Anne, kissing her lips. "Would you rather I didn't go?" he said, and looked into her eyes. They were steady.

"Why?" she simply said.

"I don't know. . . ." He kissed her again. Smiling wryly, he lingered. "I'll be back here after tea-time. . . . I don't want to go to Etheredge. . . . I thought I shouldn't." He hesitated seeking something to say.

"Good-bye," was all he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

Maurice sat in the Tuileries, smoking many cigarettes. At times he would lean back and watch through the railings the flickering silhouettes of those who passed along the Rue de Rivoli, and at others he would thrust his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, only to withdraw it again and bend forward, watching the ground. A large yellow ball rolled into his vision. He regarded that with the same concentration. A small leg, encased in shining brown gaiters, was gingerly stretched between his own, followed by a small hand that vainly struggled with the excessive ball. The boy—for it was a boy—bumped unsteadily against Maurice's knee, before he woke sufficiently to notice a big Breton nurse looming before him. She held by the hand a little girl with a hoop, and looked at Maurice unfavourably. He bent down and extricated the ball; then watched the empty ground again.

He was seeking the courage to read Madeleine's letter. It had lain in his pocket since the day of its discovery; and now he could not even find it in him to take the case out again, for it seemed that the reading must hurt him. To follow out those sloping phrases once more . . . he could not. He knew all that they had to say. He knew the address. The very room was known to him. He withdrew his hand from his pocket and watched the twinkling figures through the railings.

A large impulse came to him. The cigarette was thrown away; the case taken from his pocket without a tremor. He held the pieces together on his knee and read the letter slowly. Then he rose and began to walk along the Quai du

Louvre. A warmth of comforting decision and a fear of detection, that only wakened him to a fuller knowledge of his new felicity, were all that he felt while he crossed the bridge and passed the cold plenty of the fountains of the *place*. Not till he approached the Rue Valette did his inquietude begin. A remembered shop window, full of mildly æsthetic jewellery, of statuettes and photographs and first editions, unwillingly detained him while he glanced along the street to the high door. After a little while he walked on past the door, casting as it might be casually a furtive look into the grey emptiness which the doorway framed, and sat down in front of a cheap café. He drank coffee and asked for pen and paper.

The café was at the corner where the Rue Valette cascaded down broad stone steps into the empty boulevard. On the other side of the street, instead of the terrace on which he sat the ground had been cut away into a great basement stretching for many yards beside and below the boulevard, spanned at the near end by the stone steps as by a bridge. Out of this cutting tall dilapidated houses rose above forgotten shops, with crazy windows and signs written awry. It struck Maurice as curious that houses should be so old. As if from a tunnel beneath his feet a man and a woman appeared, dragging a tall heavy barrow along the cutting. The man's arms were bent, in the effort to balance the barrow, above his shoulders, even above his head, which was bowed almost to the ground. He seemed to be crawling slowly like an insect. The bare arms of the woman, who pushed the cart from behind, were very red. They might have been painted. Maurice saw them stop; heard the man call. Then a wooden arm swung heavily out from the roof, and a long shining chain shot down like a stream of falling water and crashed on to the ground. The woman and the man together began to haul up sacks from their barrow. The sacks jumped unsteadily upwards until they were finally engulfed in a black hole in the top of the house. Maurice counted twenty-two that made the



journey. Twenty-two sacks—that must have been heavy. He wondered what they might contain. Grain? No one could pull twenty-two sacks of grain in a barrow. They were probably full of rags. The answer satisfied him, and as the barrow slowly climbed up from the depths many yards away, Maurice turned to his cold coffee and his pen and paper.

For a while he held the pen undecidedly over a sheet. Having written nothing, he put it down and lit a cigarette. Again he took the pen and set it down once more. Then he folded a clean sheet of notepaper and sealed it into an envelope, drank his coffee, and paid the garçon. With the envelope in his pocket he walked across the road to a second-hand bookshop. He read the titles of innumerable books, following the volumes one by one along each shelf; and, when the last title had been read, he turned sharply and walked up the Rue Valette. Standing to one side of the doorway into which he had glanced descending, he stared doubtfully at the number 57. He found it strange that the blue and white number above his head should really be 57; somehow he expected it to change. That it did not change depressed him. Of course it could not be anything else. Not houses change but their inhabitants. But he could not argue himself out of a terror of that blue and white number. Someone would surely come to him if he stayed longer by the door.

The thought precipitated him over the wooden step, and he was waiting nervously in the filtered grey light of the entrance. He could not tap at the concierge's door, and he was wondering how long he could bear it, checking his incessant impulse to run away, before anyone should come.

But the concierge opened her door quickly. Her voice was very distinct; but it had very little to do with her.

“Monsieur desire . . . ?”

With anxious politeness Maurice raised his hat. With the other hand he felt for the envelope, while he asked pardon many times.

"Does Mademoiselle de la Pène live here?" he asked. He was struck by a quick agony of suspicion that she recognised him. He did not remember her at all. She had been no more than a vague voice to him. The suspicion was untrue. She was preparing to return into her room.

"She went away two months ago."

"Could you tell me where she lives now?"

"No."

He could not believe in the "No." It was too final a severance.

"But I have an important letter for her," he said haltingly. "... If I only knew..."

The concierge watched him curiously.

"Oh, a letter. . . . I believe there is an address for a letter, if that's all. She doesn't live there, though." The concierge passed into the room, and hunted among the papers in a little table. At last she came out with one slip and held it before Maurice while she fumbled the words of the address.

"76 Rue Vauquelin. Don't know it. It's not in this quarter."

The handwriting was Madeleine's. The address printed on his brain.

"Then I will write there," he said and hurried away.

The ordeal had been intolerable. It continued while he went up the street. At the top he was exhilarated and free. He felt that he had escaped from the brink of destruction, when he had emerged from the street and passed into an open square. On the corner of the pavement he hesitated what he should do. It was of no use to return to the hotel, for then he would have to go with Anne to Miss Etheredge. He did not want to do that. If he went to see her, he would go alone. The thought that Etheredge would assuredly talk to Anne of Madeleine disturbed him for a little while, until he was reassured by a subtler conviction that she would not say a word about him and Madeleine, unless he was there. And then it would not matter at all.

He walked on slowly through the streets, idly pausing before the shop windows, looking idly into the faces of the passers-by, who sometimes returned his glance. When they did he looked quickly away. A woman passed, wearing a black hat and a long grey thick coat of tweed buttoned across her throat. It made her bosom look very full. She looked at him at the very moment that he looked at her, and he glanced guiltily away. After a few steps it broke into his consciousness that she had looked at him with intent. He looked backwards over his shoulder. She was looking at him still. As their glance met she turned and walked away very slowly. He followed her a little faster. Her hands were in the pockets of her coat, and sometimes she would glance round to a point beyond him. She was, he knew, only looking to see whether he still followed. He was quite close to her, so that he could count the six large buttons of dark grey in the middle of her back. She was crossing a narrow street, and when she was fairly on the far pavement he was on the edge of the near. As he crossed, she suddenly swerved down the narrow street and hurried desperately away.

Disappointment that he had been forbidden followed his relief that he had been delivered, and he wandered uncomfortably on through unknown streets, finding some pleasure in the knowledge that it did not matter whether he was lost, for he would always be able to call a cab. His hand closed on the perceptible weight of his purse with satisfaction, even while he still felt indefinite regrets that he had not been free to follow the woman. It was as though one element were lacking in his destiny. So many were free to do what they desired without fearing the consequences. For them there were no consequences. He read the names of all the shops that he passed, wondering if it were possible to remember them all, for he recollected that a famous writer, whose name he had forgotten, could pass down a street and remember every shop that he had passed. Accordingly he tried to make a notebook of his



memory, though he foresaw, with disappointment, but little success. His purpose soon flagged, and he went on reading the names, acquiescing in the fact that he forgot them almost before his eyes had travelled the last letter. Then he paused before an obscure stationer's in the hope that he would find displayed in the window some of the excessively realistic photographs of nude women which are sold in these places. There were none. He was rather horrified at himself, and it tormented him to think that perhaps after all it was his real self that desired to see obscene pictures. Perhaps that part of him which would thrust such impulses down was unnatural. He did not solve the problem; it was too hard for him to be quite honest, but before it passed clean away from his mind he was convinced that the desire to see the pictures was much more real and vivid than his will to repress the desire. He wished he had the courage of his true self. All through this minor discussion loomed the thought that he had something more urgent to settle; but it was misted over, almost comfortably, by the abiding sense that he had made a triumphant escape from the concierge.

After a while he noticed an element of strange familiarity in the streets. The names of the shops were half remembered. He came on to a square, where men were vigorously erecting a roundabout. He went over to the middle of the square and watched them from close by. A fat pursy man with a wet underlip and a profusion of unnatural flesh directed them. His nose was soft and flabby, and his skin the colour of a chicken trussed and yellow. He stood facing Maurice and patted a rope on which four men were hauling. It was pleasant that they paid no attention to the manager at all, but talked and laughed in gasps among themselves. The fat man would have a horrible way with women. There were probably women in the show, who must loathe him. Maurice caught sight of one with a thin face, and brown hair drawn tightly over her head, standing in the background. Her neck was swathed in a black com-

forter, and her hands were in the pockets of a long grey overcoat, for all the world like the coat of the woman from whom he ran away. She would have a horrible time. He turned back to look in the direction whence he had come. It was the Place Gervais. He glanced quickly at the name on the outspread canopy of the café at the corner. It was the Parthenon. He wondered that he should not have recognised this familiar place, merely because he had come to it by an unfamiliar way; and he slowly retraced his steps, remembering with a thrill of anticipation a restaurant near by. It served lunch at four francs. He had never dared to enter it before.

As he sat down at a table he saw that few people were at lunch, and those for the most part within easy view of the end. It came as a relief therefore when the waiter came to serve him without visible reluctance. Three other people came soon after him, talking loudly. He wondered, as he had wondered many times before, that insignificant business men with plentiful beards and unhealthy faces, should not be ashamed to talk aloud with such assurance in public places.

He sat for a long while smoking while the restaurant became once more a café, and the brown tables reappeared from under their white cloths. When he thought of Anne he could not rid himself of an apprehension that he might be detected.

Detected in what? he replied victoriously, but the apprehension lingered, although he knew there was no one to detect him. Supplied with a directory, he searched for the Rue Vauquelin. He meditated over the little picture-map in the margin in precarious delight. It was a very long way distant. Seventy-six Rue Vauquelin—the name and number were somehow familiar. Madeleine must have spoken of it to him. While he turned the pages of the directory with aching fingers, he had an uneasy premonition of physical sickness, that brought back to him a memory of a time when he had sat, thus perturbed, in a

small bar in the Market, turning anxiously, as now, the leaves of a directory.

The morning had been grey and chilly, the little bar dingy, the waiter tired and dishevelled, the flimsy partition of wood and glass about to fall at a touch, it seemed, and the grog he drank lukewarm and sickly. With Madeleine he had just been to the general post office in the vain attempt to cash a money order of which the advice had gone astray. How he had hated the man at the desk, who told him he must go to yet another office, for his abruptness, and yet he shrank under it. The next day he was to return to England ; he needed the money for his journey. Madeleine had sat by him in the bar with a strained and serious face. He had seen when she had stretched out her hand to show him the office in the directory, how tight were the muscles. Then she had found the bus for him, a bus that went forlornly through raw streets to the fortifications. She had refused to go with him. "Non, je ne *peux pas*." An intense and torturing purpose showed in her face when she put her hand on his shoulder and half pushed and half led him to the bus. She waved to him with her small muff, so disproportionate to herself. He had found himself at last in a strange land, walking through long streets that seemed to be all builders' fences and bare iron railway bridges, topped here and there by lanky stone buildings, new and already stained. He remembered the impatient face of the black-bloused woman at the desk, because he had no *pièces justificatifs* ; and then while he looked at her in despair she had relented and been gracious to him.

He read the names of those who lived at 76 Rue Vauquelin—Madame Schlegel veuve, Boiffard, ingénieur, Cheminot, Victor, commissionaire, Plimsoll, Delamour, *docteur en droit*—and speculated which of these might be Madeleine's friend. He was sentimentally inclined to Delamour, but Delamour was *docteur en droit*.

He over-tipped the waiter and left the café. The round-about was now completed, and the men were fixing a



raised platform round it, with little flights of stairs. With no definite intention he walked by the hotel where he stayed at the time he first met Madeleine; but he turned away suddenly, for inside the door lolled the short, red-haired *garçon* as of old. The sight shook him, and he passed *agent* after *agent* without pausing, before he accosted one nervously and asked the way to the Rue Vauquelin. The policeman looked dutifully in his little book, before replying. If Maurice continued up the street he would come to the trams, and if he took one of those to the Place de Serbie, he would be quite near. He had only to ask again. As he went on his way, Maurice thought of writing a letter; but the answer, if there was an answer, would come to the hotel. Besides, there would be no answer. He asked himself why then he did not take a cab, and he answered sincerely that it would be too certain and too sudden if he took a cab. In such deliberations he wasted many minutes before he boarded the tram. Once, indeed, he turned about and walked back the way he had come, but after a hundred yards his step slackened and halted in front of a coiffeur's window in which he had no interest; and then he walked slowly back again.

As the tram swung swiftly along between the screeching of brakes at the halts, he found a certain inevitability in the motion. It may have frightened him; but it was welcome, too. Two schoolboys chattered energetically behind him, laughing noisily. A woman in a black shawl, holding a basket in one hand and her keys in the other, waited stolidly for her destination. It was wonderful that the journey should have no particular significance for her. Perhaps she was right and he was wrong. Perhaps he was in some sort insane. He took pride in the fact that he must be of different stuff to the rest; but his feeling of pride would not swallow up the apprehension which crept over him as he came near the Place de Serbie.

It was deserted, save for a few people who descended from the tram with him, and a few who walked on the

surrounding pavements, small and almost indistinguishable in the distance. Though his agitation would not subside enough to allow him to choose surely between different lines of action, he strove to consider what he would do if he went to seventy-six. He would find out from the concierge whether Madeleine was living there. If she was there . . . then he would go away. But the woman in the Rue Valette had said that she was not living there, and that appeared to him to be true. If she was not there, he could find out where she had gone; but the concierge would not know. She would only have been staying with somebody. Then it was impossible—impossible to go to the people with whom she had been staying and ask them. They would know who he was. They might recognise him, for they had never seen him before, but they would know. He could not contemplate the thought; but he went to a cheap bar and drank a tasteless *marc*, in order to ask for the Rue Vauquelin with some fresh confidence, not with the confidence of drink in which he had never learned to trust, but of having paid for the information. He asked the man who served him on the *zinc*, busy with wiping glasses; and his question was answered by the woman who sat severely over the tobacco. But her manner was quite kindly when she informed him that it was quite near, a matter of two turnings and five minutes' walk. She even smiled at him when he thanked her, while she rearranged her shawl. It had been disturbed by her outstretched arm.

As he went along he decided not to wait outside the door before entering. That would unnerve him completely, and this time he might not enter at all. The grey walls of a barracks covered with strips of posters downtorn in execution of the unconfident "*défense d'afficher*," and a closed kiosk, that could never have been opened, were the interludes in the two monotonous streets along which he passed. The end of the second plunged him directly upon number seventy-six. He had not been prepared for that, but he

carried out his plan with a timid assurance, and knocked at the concierge's door. She was not there. The whole house was comparatively new and cheerlessly clean. He trusted nervously in inspiration what he should say when the concierge did come, for he could frame nothing while he waited. She came out of the courtyard, looking unexpectedly young, but rather florid. She dropped a key, and plunged down to pick it up, before passing under the archway.

"Does Mademoiselle de Pène live here?" He said the words abruptly, with the last gasp of his falling courage.

"She's gone. You have a message for her?"

"No. . . . I wanted to see her, herself . . . something important."

"Impossible. She has left Paris. . . ."

He did not know what to say, but he managed to make his look one of deliberate reflection.

"Then I must send a telegram. . . . But I don't know the address."

"Neither do I. She was not one of the *locataires*."

"But what can I do, madame?" he asked in an access of helplessness. She kept silence until she finally said:

"She lived with Madame Delamour, *au troisième*. You can go and ask her."

"I shall disturb her?"

"That's your affair."

The woman laughed, not unfriendly. He thanked her and opened the door on to the stairs. Out of her sight, on the first story, he decided to wait some minutes, and then to leave as though he had found out the address from Madame Delamour. He waited one minute in suspense. The bell of the door below sounded and someone began to ascend the stairs, whistling *Sur les Ponts de Paris*. Maurice went up the stairs slowly. The steps behind would neither overtake him nor stop. He saw the brass plate on the door—*Étienne Delamour. Docteur en Droit*—and went past. On the landing above he stopped perforce. It was the top



of the house save for a narrow gallery slung high in air, which could lead only to a single door. Holding himself perfectly still, Maurice heard the steps halt, a key turn in a lock, and the whistling suddenly ceased as the door latched. That must have been Monsieur Delamour. He was very glad he had not waited in front of his flat. He came down slowly, stopped in front of the door, and pulled at the red cord of the bell.

*Sur les Ponts de Paris* approached. The temptation to run away was great, but the quick thought that there was no time, that the whole house would hear his steps as he clattered down the three stories, enabled him to stand his ground. The man, black with a thin curled black moustache, was plainly surprised.

"I wish to know the present address of Mademoiselle de la Pène."

"I will call my wife," the man said, all but closing the door. Maurice heard him call her by a name he could not catch—it sounded like "Broua"—and speak a word with her. She came to the door, opened it wide and said, "Come in."

He began to say "Je voudrais seulement . . .," but he could not avoid entering. She ushered him into the salon, a tiny room, curtained to suffocation, ticked by a monstrous clock. As she followed him into the room, he found something familiar in her face, with its thin black eyebrows and pinched nose, even in the high black collar of her blouse. He thought that he could detect recognition in her look.

"I wished to know the address of Mademoiselle De la Pène. I hope that I do not disturb you ; but the concierge could not tell me. She said I might find it from you."

"Would you please tell me your name ?"

Foolishly he had not expected the question. He dared not hesitate with his answer. "My name is Monsieur French," he said, glib with sudden inspiration. An instinct that he must not reveal his name had come to him.

With it came an intolerable desire to see Madeleine once more.

"You'll pardon me, but I am her sister. Before she left she told me not to give her address to certain people. Vous êtes Anglais, peut-être ?"

He told an unexpected lie, smiling. "Non. Je suis Irlandais," he said. "C'est autre chose."

"I will write the address for you." She went over to a table by the window. While she looked for paper she said, casually, with her back turned to him :

"You have known my sister for a long while ?"

"I met her three years ago. . . . I was in Paris with a friend who knew her well."

"She never spoke to me of you. That is why I asked, Monsieur F . . ."

"French," he explained.

"Monsieur French," she repeated. She turned round in her chair suddenly.

"What was his name, your friend ?"

"Temple," said Maurice unhesitating. ". . . He was English."

"I know that name," she said.

"It's a sad story. . . ." As he spoke he felt unutterably sad.

"You have news of him ?" Against the light he could hardly see her face. Vaguely she seemed to him divided between severity and pity.

"He is dead. . . . That is why I wanted to find the address."

"Oh, la pauvre, la pauvre petite. . . ." said Madame Delamour.

"He died two years ago," Maurice continued. Desolation swept over him at his own words. They seemed to wither him. He was crying. But he went on slowly.

". . . He was Madeleine's lover. You know, I suppose. But I was the only one of all his friends who knew about it. I was with him when he first saw her. After that, about

three months afterwards, I went away to America. I was travelling about everywhere, and I did not get any letters. When I came back, six weeks ago, I found a letter from Maurice saying that he was going to kill himself. . . . He had killed himself, a year ago. His family would not hear of his marrying, and without them he had no money. . . . In his letter he told me to find Madeleine, and to give her all the money he had. It's not very much—six hundred francs.”

“And she loved him all the while,” said Madame Delamour. “. . . Only he never wrote. It broke her heart. . . . You would not recognise her now. . . . I said to her that perhaps he was dead ; but she always said ‘no,’ but that it was his mother who would not let him write, and would not let him come to her. . . . I was right. . . .” She was crying, too. “It is sad,” she said.

“That is why I wish to go to her myself,” said Maurice. “He sent me a letter which I was to take to her myself, if I could. . . . But it's two years ago. . . . I must take it. . . . You understand ?”

“Naturally. . . . It will be a sad journey for you. . . . She has thought of him always . . . always. She thinks of him now, of nothing else. I have not been able to prevent her. She should not have stayed in Paris. She had so very little money. It's a hard life as a modiste here, you know. . . . But now she has gone home to the South. . . . It's a long way from here, not far from Bordeaux, on the main railway line. . . . Perhaps it would be better to write first. I could write her a word myself.”

“I think it would be better if I went. That is what his letter said. I will go to-morrow, and I shall get there before the letter would. . . . In any case I think it would be better not to write.”

“I believe you are right. Here is the address, Monsieur.” Before giving him the slip of paper she read it aloud. “Mademoiselle de la Pène, rue Gambetta, Lesdigues, Corrèze.”



"Is there no number?"

"No . . . it is only a village; but there is a railway station."

"I thank you." Maurice rose. As he said "Good-bye" Madame Delamour held out her hand to him. When he took it, she said, "You must tell her softly. It is a thing that can kill." He saw that she was near to crying. With her before him, tall black collar, little mouth, long thin nose, and hair à la Bernhardt, he believed it all. On an impulse he bent down and kissed her hand. It was a gesture he had often wished to accomplish, but for which his courage had always failed him. In another room on the door of which another brass plate shone faintly through the gloom of the corridor, he heard Monsieur Delamour whistling *Sur les Ponts de Paris*.

Passing downstairs he was thrilled with confused excitement. He was silent and sad at his own death. He glowed with the triumph of his inspiration. Hardly he could tell which was the truth. Slowly from the turmoil emerged a sense of achievement. More than achievement, he reflected, for he was now certain that Madeleine had forbidden her sister to give him her address. It was a miracle of achievement.

The spring wind, as it scattered old newspapers along the street, blew a grey chill, as from the walls it grazed, into his heart. Sooner or later, Madeleine would be told that he was dead. It would be terrible if she believed him dead. Better believe that, came a grotesque echo, than that you are alive. He would have none of the echo. He wanted her to be thinking of him still, always thinking of him, and himself to be alive. Madame Delamour's assurance that she had always thought of him salved his pride; but he could not believe it was his pride that was assuaged.

And so it comforted him that he carried Madeleine's address in his pocket; for it gave him a dim confidence in setting matters right by writing to her. By the time that he had found a place in the returning tram, he felt guilty.

He was afflicted by the knowledge that he had done something wrong, for which there was no excuse. The faster the tram sped towards his familiar ground, the more the crookedness of his day presented itself to him. It was an instinctive conviction, unrelated to any person. He was approaching the hotel and Anne. His only concern was that he should not betray himself by any awkwardness in his behaviour. His love for Anne was not affected by what he had done, and it was really preposterous that he should have to guard his behaviour, because of an unmeaning pretence. He wondered whether it would be more convincing to be forward with an account of an imaginary day or to say nothing at all until he was asked. Inclining towards saying nothing at all, he postponed the problem. Nor was any harm done to Madeleine. On the contrary, if she believed him dead, it would probably be a good deal better for her, seeing that an ideal would have been preserved to her. Arguments, visions of Anne and Madeleine tempest together ; but the knowledge of guilt remained to make him uneasy.

What on earth did he do it for ? he began to ask himself, and he could find no answer. Well, it was done, he thought, and it was no use wishing it undone, and if it was any use to wish, he would not have had it undone. He had, in some way, approached nearer to Madeleine thereby, and he wanted that. But he had enough. He crumpled the paper Madame Delamour had given him, and threw it out of the window ; but he knew very well that he could not forget the address.

Anne was the only problem, and that was only a question of the manner in which he met her. He recollected that she was going to tea with Etheredge, and fervently hoped that she had not repented of her intention. If she had not she would be at Etheredge's still. The woman at the hotel bureau anticipated his asking.

"Madame has gone out a few minutes ago."

"And Monsieur Beauchamp—mon ami ?"

"He did not return last night ; and he has not been in all day."

"He met some of his friends last night. What could you expect ? " He was on comfortable terms with this lady.

"C'est dommage, parfois—des amis," she said reflectively.

"Vous croyez ? C'est une espèce très rare, tout de même."

"Ça c'est vrai," she said in the same tone.

It was warm in the sitting-room, and the lights were warmly shaded. He ordered tea with some prospect of enjoyment. When the waiter had left the room he inspected himself in the mirror, anxious to see that no startling, self-revealing change had occurred. He half-expected it. Curious why Dennis had not come back, he went to peep in his room and found that the door was locked. "Naturally," he said to himself and settled in an armchair. Turning over the leaves of the big time-table in an idle search to find where Lesdigues might really be situated, he waited, in a hazy fatigue, but not uncomfortably, the arrival of the ordered tea.



## CHAPTER VII

THE door clicked softly when Maurice left the room in the morning. "*Finis* to that chapter," said Anne to herself. Though she was sad and weary, the click of the self-closing latch seemed to her such a ridiculous end. "The death of tragedy," she said aloud, putting her hands behind her head and closing her eyes as she lay upon her back. No heroic emotions rioted in her soul. Instead she felt empty. A living pulse which controlled her being and made her one, had ceased to act. She found herself smiling when she had no cause to smile, fastening upon words and incidents, when not they, but the bigger event of which they were the outward fringe, were important. "Well, well," she said.

If that was the natural motion of her soul, there was nothing better than to yield to it. A cloud of doubts, anxieties, apprehensions, hung very close to her; but there was no contact between her and them. In her mood she was free of such perturbations, free of all things save that persistent throb of physical pain in her breast.

Then thoughts began to assail her. She tried to see the beginning and end of the story; and, while old emotions came back to vivid life, she wondered whether she had ever been really in love with Maurice. Steadily she answered herself "No." But she had been at the beginning of love; she had spread the ground with palms before it; she had waited for love. She had waited for love, and how could it come to a woman who waited for it? She had been too conscious; she would pay for it now, by waiting. This was only her end, not his, and she would wait until he made an end. She could not; she wanted to be cleanly free. He should leave her of his own deliberate choice, and

finally. "How can you treat him so?" came the reply, "It's only cruelty." She denied the charge. Maurice was himself, hard, impenetrable, alone; he could work out his own destiny. He was no burden on her conscience now. Her mind thought clear of him. Her feelings had been bruised where they touched him, and were insensible.

Her mind turned towards the future and was afraid. She was lonely again, and in her loneliness weaker than of old. She peered about in the shadows for what might come. Love—a tightness in her throat, a sudden upburst of tears in her eyes, came as the unsought accompaniment of her thought—was a beautiful, futile thing; like the bird in the pagan king's story, which flew out of the darkness across the lighted window and returned to the darkness again. She revolted against this temporary thing, and longed for a permanent thing beyond it, whence she might derive a strength to maintain herself against the life which brutally beat against her. Strong and permanent—the very words seemed to laugh at her, at this moment when she was at the mercy of life again. She thought of the barren years, the weak years when she had been with Jim, when she had come to expect nothing of life and to fear nothing. Never could she return to that condition. Now she expected much and feared much.

When would the last remains of this old affection be gone? She was waiting for Maurice to act, and in the waiting-space she was empty and dead. How could she wait thus calculating? It was cruel to him perhaps, but more cruel to her; and it was not calculation, but some instinct which bade her wait. Calculation! How could she calculate? Her memory throbbed with the pain of intimate memories; her breast seemed to ache for his pillowed head, and her hands for the feel of his rough hair. Wait, wait! She could not suffer more; she had suffered too much—and to wait. She buried her head in her pillow.

The inertia that gradually invaded her while she lay

still was welcome. Her thoughts were muffled and dumb when they came to her. Having once resigned control of herself, she was again natural and free in her waking sleep ; and she wondered how it could be that she should accept her sundering from Maurice as a natural thing. Already she seemed to have passed beyond it ; and it had cost her no more than that. In a mood of vague wonderment she fell asleep, and slept into the afternoon.

Waking, she was perplexed ; and then she worried about the time. For some reason she was eager not to fail Miss Etheredge. When she found it was no more than twenty minutes past three, she dressed carefully and descended into the dining-room.

While she ate mechanically, with a kind of amazement at the character of her occupation, she was consumed with an impatience to see Miss Etheredge. The engagement was solid and definite, amid the ineffectual chaos of her mind. More than that she wanted to see Miss Etheredge for herself. In spite of her weakness and inward anarchy, by which Anne had at first been almost persuaded to regard her as one of her own possible selves, remotely past, Etheredge was positive and achieved. Anne pitied her ; yet she repelled pity, and seemed to demand a more equal approach. Anne could have made many explanations of Etheredge. She made some while she sat in the empty dining-room, outlasting the creeping minutes, and each, she felt, had some truth. They were built upon the scheme of strong sensuality in incessant conflict with a deeply native virginity ; but always beyond the explanation was Etheredge's power. She was not futile nor was she pitiful. It was no excess of pity which had so affected Anne at their meeting yesterday. Anne could hardly give an account of her feelings ; she was in no mood for that : but she knew that an instinctive repulsion had worked side by side with an intimate attraction. She might have been fronting some strange woman from the immemorial East. The figure of Etheredge now rose constantly before her eyes in



the closer memory wherein thought is only a haze to obscure all definite vision.

Thus as Anne slowly walked out of the hotel, on the way talking for a moment with the woman in the bureau, her mind was, without any direction of her own, intent upon Miss Etheredge. Even the slowness of her walk might have been due rather to a natural response to the nature of the attraction than to her own desire. Indeed, she had no cause to linger. The people of Paris had never been so profoundly strange and alien to her. They glided by her like material phantoms, until she was borne onwards out of the eddy of her momentary delay by a dim purpose, which left her, unsurprised, at the corner of a street which she had never seen before. Though her information had been vague and was now forgotten, she knew that this was the street she sought. She turned round and watched in a dream the thin wisps of mist slowly moving from the face of the river, and their place supplied by other sweeping white threads. The quay, the open book-boxes, the little sprouting trees, whose round tops were each like one large straggling bud, the estraded pavement with its iron rail, and across the Seine the long mass of crouching buildings like some misshapen animal—these were canvas decorations. They had no solid reality to support them. She alone was real, in a way she could not comprehend. She was foreign to herself now, and through her mind ran a thin vein of self-suspicion, or doubt that this Anne whom she did not know, could truly be, as she felt, more real than the Anne she knew.

She was looking at a long shop-window opposite, filled with prints. It was only a background to the little silhouettes of people hurrying along before it, not intent with real purpose as she, but propelled by some giant mechanism. One of them retained her look for more than a glance. Her eyes followed it slowly, for it moved more slowly than the rest. Then it was familiar. That did not suffice to lift it out of the unreal procession: but it gave it an interest,

as one more grotesque figure than the rest might hold the attention in a marionette-show. More, its familiarity had an indefinable tweak and was suddenly unfamiliar. He went with head bent towards the ground, with one or two stiff motions of his arms, which contrasted with the dragging gait, and so disappeared round the corner by the shop. All the while Anne had known it was Dennis; but the knowledge could not be translated into meaning. They might have been two planets on their courses, meeting for a moment in an eternity. But the twist of sudden strangeness intruded upon her a question, as it were an arabesque inscrutably entwined in some far edge of her mind, a point of irritation. She remembered with surprise when and where she left him, how long ago it was; and in the interval he had changed. "Something has happened to him." The interest of a passing curiosity was awakened in her. It was still engaging some disconnected working of her mind, when she passed inside the door of number twenty-three, rue Sévigné.

The passage was long and dark, lined with glazed tiles which reflected no more than the obscurity they bounded. Her sudden glance perceived the dark light of a glazed double door. There seemed to be no exit. Nevertheless, she went forward without pausing, resolved to ask no direction from the concierge, who must, she knew, be looming in the darkness beyond. The clatter of the swing-doors as she passed through served to hasten her steps to the top of the first flight of narrow stairs, where she was beyond the range of the janitor. Then she mounted slowly, gravely inspecting the names upon the doors. The brown of indescribable varnish, feebly glancing the rays of the chill sun, dirtied in their reflected passage down the well of the courtyard and through the dusky panes of the stairlight, was only the sordid and evitable edge of her dream. The grimy red bell-rope, that dangled a tarnished and incongruous splendour beside the door where a thumbed card, pinned askew, told her to stop, soiled her white glove when

she pulled. The sharp clangour of the bell after the rusty whisper of the wire, sounding close by instead of in a muffled distance, startled her. She looked at the dust-marks on her gloves, as at something incomprehensible, while she waited.

A sound of shuffling feet, a voice pitched uncertainly between nervous laughter and exclamation, came to her. The latch was drawn with an exaggerated click and the door opened a little way. The opening was wholly filled by a narrow glimpse of Miss Etheredge, clothed in some hardly visible stripes, turned half away as though she were talking to someone behind her. A curious expression showed in her face. It had something of mincing shyness and of false embarrassment; but her dark eyes, intensely black in the surrounding half-lights, regarded Anne steadily.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Do come in. . . . I'm not at all dressed."

She backed her legs behind the door in her affectation of shyness, and laughed, in a tiny, explosive, inconsequent way.

It was some while before she opened the door enough for Anne to attempt to enter. Miss Etheredge stood in the corner by the door, holding a striped blanket about herself, clad beneath in pyjamas.

While she held out her hand to Anne, she seemed to hold back her body, so that the gesture was incongruous, strangely compounded of big and little, attractive and repellent. The accent of her greeting was elaborate.

"How do you do, Mrs. Cradock? I had made up my mind that you wouldn't come, or I would have been dressed, and done something to the—studio. . . ." Her voice suddenly changed, became quicker and unelaborate. "But I'm glad you've come. I was certain you wouldn't."

As she watched her, Anne longed to put her arms round her neck. Then the bigness of the woman before her penetrated to her mind, and she smiled.



"Why did you think I wouldn't come?"

"I thought you'd forget—something like that. . . . We made the arrangement very quickly after all. I didn't take it quite seriously myself. . . . You haven't brought Temple with you . . . he wouldn't come?" The question asserted the fact.

"No. He didn't want to."

Miss Etheredge gathered herself together out of her corner, and led the way into a long low room, littered with papers, chaotic with tumbled canvases, the mantel-mirror insecurely placarded with drawings and cards. A dirty sun-blind, hanging unseasonably low outside the window that looked on to the well, obscured everything. In the greater gloom at the end of the room, through the space where once had been a wide door, was a cushioned seat against the wall, encompassing on three sides a marble-topped table from some derelict café.

"It's the only place to sit down—the only decent place."

Anne made her way to it.

"My God—it is in a mess," said Miss Etheredge.

She took a yellow paper of cigarettes from the mantel-piece and sat down opposite Anne. The cigarettes she spread upon the table between them, and lighted one for herself, waiting till the blue flame of the sulphur match changed into white. Anne would not smoke. Though she watched Miss Etheredge, the gloom was such that only in the brief moment of the yellow flame, could she see her plainly. Then her lips appeared to be tight pressed, and her eyes full of tears. But Anne remembered that this was the permanent aspect of her eyes, and waited.

"You're not in a hurry for tea? I've put the kettle on; but it takes a long while. Something's wrong with the gas. . . . Not much of a place to live in, is it?"

"It is rather dark," said Anne.

"Yes. . . . I dare say it suits me though."

The memory of her encounter at the corner of the street pressed upon Anne. She made her discovery aloud.

"But Mr. Beauchamp was to have come too, wasn't he . . . ? I haven't seen him since last night."

"He was here just before you came. . . . He wouldn't stop to tea." The addition was an afterthought. "That's an awfully nice coat you're wearing," she went on. "Did you get it in England or here ? "

Anne wondered why she should trouble to make conversation. She could not really see the coat. But they had looked at each other in the passage.

"I bought it here a week ago. . . . I'm glad you like it."

Silence and the dim light went together. Miss Etheredge smoked, bending forwards, her elbows resting upon her knees. The end of her cigarette faintly glowed. Anne could hear the distant purr of the kettle.

"That was a funny tea-party . . . at Ramsay's yesterday." Miss Etheredge's words shot up into a laugh. "I suppose it's rather trying if you're a stranger. . . . I'm not the person to be about with here. Everybody I know is my enemy . . . except Bill. . . ."

There was a long silence. Miss Etheredge broke it suddenly.

"Oh, you came to see my pictures, of course. And so did Mr. Beauchamp, now I come to think of it. Well, it doesn't matter. He didn't see them. That's where they are."

She pointed to the fireplace in the further room, where a trickle of smoke painfully climbed from a mass of charring cinder. Then she went across to the fire and stirred the ashes about with a piece of broken picture-frame. A dull red showed like a winter sun, sprinkled with yellow, draggled sparks that died down into the blackness again.

"They made a fine blaze just when he came in. . . . And yet I forgot all about telling him what it was. He didn't ask either. Perhaps that was politeness."

She put a few odd pieces of wood from the hearth into the red centre of the ashes. As she rose again to her full height from powerfully crouching, she threw the stick she held

in her hand on to the rest, and went back to her place. Both were silent. The creeping gloom stole about Anne, sealing her lips. The wood on the fire caught into a few yellow flames that danced lamely upwards and expired. Before they died they flashed a fitful light from wall to wall.

"You don't say very much," said Miss Etheredge.

"No. . . ."

"Not much to say, is there? I suppose this kind of thing is hard to understand. You'd pity me if you didn't feel that I'm not exactly the person to be pitied. Isn't that it?"

"I wonder. . . . Yes, that's part of it, anyhow."

"No wonder I'm a strange animal when I come out into the light. Perhaps I don't belong there any more. Do you think I've lived with myself too long? . . . But then you have, too . . . longer than me, haven't you?"

"A long while, certainly."

"And you can still do things, can't you? You went away with young Temple. That wants doing. I couldn't do that. If I want to begin, everything seems rotten. I know beforehand that everything will fail. Everything and everybody. It's all the same. The men turn beasts. The women turn nothing at all. They're only a second-rate double of the men they hang on to. The best of them go that way. I can't do that."

Miss Etheredge was crying. Her words came in short, high-pitched rushes between the sobs which rose through her body, like quiet waves.

"And this is the best I can do with life. . . . Four pictures burnt and making the hell of a mess in my fireplace. . . . I don't even know what I want from anybody. . . . I only know I'm bound to hate them, and they're bound to hate me. . . . It's there at the very beginning. . . . The people that would be good to me, only do it because they pity me. . . . I can't have that. It's no good. . . ."

"How I hate this room! . . . But it's mine. It's me. It makes you miserable, just the same as I make you miser-



able. Funny . . . young Temple was just like that when he met me. I hurt people just because I have to hurt them. What the devil should I be if I didn't fight? There wouldn't be anything left. . . . No, I'll have to keep a dog—and a cat perhaps, like Colette—be nice and meek and mild, cutting up meat and biscuits for the darling. Yes, I should be fine with a menagerie, fine, a world of my own to manage on *six sous de lait* a day.”

Anne listened. It was all like what she had heard yesterday; but now it held her silent. Miss Etheredge was speaking inside Anne herself now; and Anne could not believe that this was the woman and these the words of yesterday. Her eyes were fixed through the gloom upon her companion, and when a sudden gleam of light passed with deep flickering shadows between them, her gaze did not falter. It was as though she heard herself speaking. Some part of her of which she had been afraid, which she had suppressed with all her power, had suddenly become triumphant and vocal. She listened. She did not even feel that Miss Etheredge was a separate person. The momentary impulse of her pity was forgotten. She listened to a voice.

Miss Etheredge threw her burnt cigarette abruptly away. It lay a dying cinder, in the middle of the floor. The gesture woke Anne. Quietly and deliberately she took off her hat, and laid it on the cushioned seat beside her, stabbing in the pins. Then she pushed her way between the round table and the seat and sat down by Miss Etheredge. Even while she put her arms round her neck, she felt how large were her shoulders, how incongruous her own embrace.

“Oh, my darling . . .,” she said. “I know.” Miss Etheredge's head sank upon Anne's shoulders. She was aware of the full weight of the body that pressed down upon hers; and she braced herself against it.

There was silence in which Anne's mind would no longer work. The power of thought floated far away from her.

Her hands gently caressed the body which she clasped, caressed it automatically. Automatically she was saying ineffectual things. "Don't cry. . . . Don't cry."

When Miss Etheredge lifted her head again, Anne leant back in the corner. She was weak, as though a strength had departed from her, and the great sobs that moved through Miss Etheredge's body had been torn from the depths of her own.

"I suppose," said Miss Etheredge, with a half-laugh, "that does me good. They say so, don't they?"

Anne nodded. Through her mind unexpectedly flashed some ridiculous words that she had read as a child. "Smiles after tears are like sunshine after rain." She closed her eyes a moment and waited for the sunshine.

"But it really doesn't make much odds, does it?" went on Miss Etheredge. "I shall be just the same. Everybody goes on hating me. You'll hate me. . . . No, perhaps you won't. You're too much like me. I wonder what's the difference between you and me, after all."

"Not very much," whispered Anne.

"You're hurt and you don't hurt back. Is that it? You don't make such a muck of it as I do. I'll go on hurting people. . . . You'll go on loving young Temple. He'll take every bit of it and give you credit for nothing. He'd only give you credit for something if you were like me. . . . No, but you don't really love him. . . . I can see that. . . . Some people think I ought to marry."

She spoke with a voice suddenly changed. Anne had an instant sense that she was no longer speaking from a mind full of thoughts and ideas, but from some active actual wound within her. It was like the upburst of a cry of pain, for all the vagueness of the words.

"What do you think about that?" She put the question to Anne abruptly, savagely. It might have been a grim and ridiculous joke, covering an outrage to herself.

"To marry." Anne repeated the phrase dully. Her comprehension was tired. "No," she said sharply, in-

stinctively: and then continued as she realised the question.

"It's easy to say 'marry,' as though it were something like having your teeth seen to. . . . To marry means to marry a man. The man's the important thing. He may be one man in a million. He'd have to be. With the rest you'd lose yourself, or be worse off than you are . . . so much yourself that you'd go mad. To some women marriage may be the beginning of everything, or it may be hell; and it's always for those women that the chances are a million to one that it will be hell, one kind of hell or another. . . . And marriage, after all, is a bad word. Marriages are common enough. There must be a hundred an hour. If you say love, you get some idea of what you're after. . . . We don't say so because we're afraid of being sentimentalists. 'Love,' yes. You ought to be in love. So ought I and every woman alive. Sometimes I think—I'm always thinking it now—that life can only begin when we have finished with love. I don't mean a year's passion. That's good. But we come out of it wanting it again, wanting more from it than ever is in it. We never find it, of course. How should we? Life can't go on by old experiences. They aren't experiences any more. They're dead before they are ever born. And we are tired of them before they come. So we accept some drug to make us forget that we ever were ourselves, that we ever wanted anything more than to forget. Perhaps the time has come for that for me. I've felt terribly old to-day, terribly old. But I can't believe it. Something in me won't let me believe it. I think there's something in love and still beyond it, a moment when you see something beyond love before love is dead, something to be achieved out of two persons and beyond themselves.

"After all the lesser thing will never be enough for people like you and me. We have the wrong temperament; perhaps we belong to the wrong people. I can't face an experience any more that has an end and is dead.



I thought I could until—quite lately. It's that makes me wonder whether I am growing old. Is it old, I wonder, to find out that where I thought I was asking nothing from life, I was asking everything : and that it was only because I was asking so much that I seemed to be asking so little ? ”

They were silent a little while. Anne seemed to be trying to answer her own hard question.

“ Perhaps,” she went on, now as though she were talking aloud to herself, “ what I'm asking for is only marriage after all. Every woman that's any good, then, asks for that—the freedom to be herself. Every man, too, I suppose. It's funny that it should take so long for a man to know he must find it in a woman, and a woman to know that it's a man. I'm sure it's really true that we're given in marriage in heaven. If that's the marriage you mean, then you should marry, and so should I . . . But that doesn't tell us much, does it ?

“ I used to think I could master life by having a sort of poise ; if I was only steadily myself, never letting myself go altogether, it would be all right. But that was only a kind of sickness, I can see now. It meant denying things beforehand. It was forced, just as if you were to decide to behave to everybody else as everybody else behaves, to play their own little game with a sort of contempt. I thought I was superior to all my experience. I don't think it was offensive. It would be hard for me to hurt anybody deliberately. But it was so *poor*. I held myself back from everything as though my life depended upon it ; and in my way I must have been just as Morry has been all along. It was the narrowest chance I ever went away with him. I can see all that now. He let himself go for a moment, the critical moment, and I felt it and followed him. You're right. In a small way it was a real thing that I did.

“ Then I've had to get back this . . . poise. . . . I had to maintain myself against him, because he would never help me. He fights away from me always. Perhaps I am stronger than he is. But he's always frightened for him-

self, and so I've had to become myself again ; right at the very beginning I had to. I've only just realised that that's what I meant by poise. It's only holding yourself clear. And now it's not enough any more. It's old and tired and empty. People are not meant to be self-contained. . . . To give everything to somebody who gives himself in return, to be free of the load of one's self—that would make us really free, to accept the things we're frightened of."

Anne stopped. While she leant back wearily in the corner, and looked into the chilly gloom in front of her, she wondered why she had talked. She had rid herself of no burden, and in recompense she felt only a throb of anxiety lest what she had said should be handled by an enemy. The very fact of her confession seemed to have put a wall between her and Miss Etheredge, at the moment when they had come closest together. In the silence was a suggestion of something hostile, that she was in no way fit to combat, for she had laid down hostility for ever.

The kettle asserted itself noisily in the lull, and Miss Etheredge bestirred herself to get tea. She did it so quickly that Anne, fastening aimlessly on small evidences, was certain that it must have been ready prepared. There was even a plateful of cakes.

"You're coming to dinner to-night, aren't you ?" Anne asked.

"I wasn't invited. They don't invite me. You know why."

"Neither was I invited, as far as I can remember. Morry told me about it."

"Stay here then. I'll get something to eat. We can go and upset them afterwards. They're going to the *Parthenon*, I suppose."

"He did say something about a café."

"That's it then. It's always the same."

"But you see I promised Morry that I'd go. I think I must. Why don't you come, too ?"

"The same old reason. . . . Who's going to be there ?"

"I don't know ; but I imagine the people who were at tea yesterday."

"But Wauchope's gone into the country. I'd like to know if he's taken Netta with him, like to know very much. . . . I'd make it damned uncomfortable for him. . . . Everybody except Wauchope. . . . No, I shan't go. I'll go to the *Parthenon* afterwards. Then I'll pay for my own drink and be quite independent. . . . And I shall see my new *beau*. . . . You don't know about him ? "

"No."

Miss Etheredge laughed. "Oh, that's your Mr. Beauchamp. We had a beautifully intimate conversation here this afternoon, a little while before you came. We suited each other fine, I can tell you. We even wept together. He's a great admirer of mine now ; ready to sacrifice everything for me, just out of kindness and pure affection. Oh, quite a romance. . . . I wonder whether he'd be glad to see me, again, to-night."

"Surely he would."

Fantastic anxieties beset Anne in her desolation. She was troubled by Miss Etheredge's words. The thought that Dennis had done this thing apart from her hurt her now. She did not know what the thing might be. But Dennis had failed her too. She had not yet believed that she stood so nakedly alone. For an instant she thought that Miss Etheredge was aiming at her. But how could Miss Etheredge know that it mattered to her what Dennis did ? She herself knew it only now.

"Why not ? " she added.

"I don't think he would somehow. He'd feel he had given himself away. And he'd be upset at the idea I would give him away too. . . . Give him away. . . . That's what the best man does at a marriage, isn't it ? . . . I'm terribly ignorant, really. . . ."

"Yes, that's nearly right."

"That's damn funny, then—damn funny ! " Her laugh escaped into a shriek.



Anne was frightened, not of her hysteria, but of a sense beneath her words. Miss Etheredge lit a smoky lamp and set it on the table. Then she took a scattered, loose-leaved sketch-book and, as she sat beside Anne, began to draw quickly. Leaning forward, massively beautiful, her long fingers sweeping a piece of charcoal over the paper, she seemed to Anne ruthless and terrible. Anne wanted to escape from her as from an evil thing.

"No, it's too good," said Miss Etheredge, laughing with tears in her eyes while she drew. "'Miss Etheredge giving Mr. Beauchamp away,' that's so much better than Mr. Dennis giving himself away."

Whether of purpose or not, she held the paper so that Anne could see. Though Anne tried to drag her eyes away she was fascinated by the charcoal point. Miss Etheredge drew a gigantic caricature of herself, statuesque and imperturbable like a smiling Egyptian god. The smile seemed to Anne to be the very expression of what she feared in her. "But that must be imagination," she thought, for the mouth was only a hasty line, and she sought to shake off the illusion. With outstretched, implacable hands the goddess was giving two pigmies each to the other. One was beyond all doubt Dennis—with a strange familiar droop to his shoulders; the other—while she waited Anne was haunted by the strange attitude of Dennis—Miss Etheredge herself, as she sat there opposite Anne but a little while ago—Miss Etheredge, shy and reluctant, virginal, caricatured, but real. Before she had finished, she crumpled the paper up and threw it on to the floor.

"It's a good idea," said Miss Etheredge, much calmer now. "It's the only way I can hold up against things, by drawing them. But I'll never make anything of that one anyhow. I can't go through with it. Sentimentality or something gets in the way. It's always the same. . . ."

The relief that came to Anne when Miss Etheredge crumpled up the drawing and threw it away was sudden and profound. Even the white ball of paper lying impotent

upon the floor still fascinated her like a malignant insect done to death. She was still trying to discover what had brought to her mind the drooping line of Dennis's shoulder in the drawing. It was so vivid that it obsessed her, and she said with but half her thought to her speech :

"You can be terribly cruel . . . too cruel."

"Genius gone wrong ?"

"You're so cruel to yourself. . . . You shouldn't do things like that. Somehow it seems to me wrong—evil !"

"I won't draw you, anyhow. I couldn't."

"There's something in you that frightens me, as though you had the power to turn bad—really bad. I don't know how to tell you."

"Perhaps I have. Who knows ? Who's got any idea of what I have to go through, what I've been through ? And if I'm turned wrong and cruel it's myself I'm wrong and cruel to, first of all. . . . But do you know ? Other people would just think that was funny, just as they think I'm a kind of joke. The only ones that really appreciate me are terrified of me. You can understand that, can't you ? They can't. Not even those who are frightened of me. They've no idea how I'm frightened of myself. You don't think I don't know there something wrong in that ?" She pointed to the ball of paper. "You know I hate myself when I do that . . . but if I didn't . . ."—she lifted her eyes from the ground and her head from her breast and looked at Anne—" . . . I believe I should go mad. Lonely. . . . They don't know what loneliness is. I think I could paint a lonely woman. They'd think that was funny too—the swine.

"One thing about your Mr. Beauchamp. He didn't see anything funny in me. I will say that for him. . . . But he saw something he won't forget, before he got away. Yes, he'll remember me.

"I suppose you've read a lot. You've read Wilde, anyway, and Baudelaire. . . . They're said to be naughty, aren't they ? I dare say they are. And not much good, really.

I don't know a bit what's first chop in these things. But they were lonely. People go like that because they're lonely, I know. My God, I don't blame them. . . . But a woman . . . that's a different affair. Yes, I'd like to find someone like me. You're like me in some ways ; and then you're quite different. Wauchope's like me. But it's only a touch. Lots of men have a touch. But you don't find many who've got nothing else, all day long, nothing else at all. They are bloody freaks. Yes, it's true, they *are* funny, bloody funny.

"But I'm being quite sensible about it now, ain't I? No more weeping. That's you being here. Wait till you've gone. No, stay here till you have to go. Then I can go out to dinner at the same time as you. It's not many minutes more. But I *am* being very quiet about it now. I haven't been like this for months. . . .

"Then, sometime, I'll have to go back to the bosom of my family. I shouldn't get any money if I didn't. And my mother'll say : 'My poor child, what have you been doing to yourself?' She always starts off like that. 'We must feed you up. You've been eating that horrible French food. . . .'

"When I'm like this I can see it really is funny. There is some humour in the old world still. Perhaps I shall like that one of these days, and I'll just stay there, and go on being well fed by my mother. . . . I'm making you tired."

"No," said Anne, "I was tired long before I came here ; and I'm not more tired now."

"I'd like to come to that dinner."

"Then why not?"

"No, it's no good. I can't stand too much. I don't think I'd be much good to-day. I shouldn't be funny enough, and they'd be disappointed. No, it's been a heavy day, even for me. I was dancing a *pas seul* even before you came. Really a *pas seul*, in front of the mirror there. That's always about the beginning of the end."

"The beginning of the end." The phrase became real.



A chill atmosphere of death seemed to hang about that room, to have crept into Anne's soul. Memories of ancient dreams and old deaths gathered about it. Pitifully she desired Miss Etheredge's tears, Miss Etheredge weeping rather than Miss Etheredge cold and hard. This tyrannised over her and held her fast. She had not even the desire to be away. She was fixed with something that she dared not look at, and dared not escape.

"I don't think your Mr. Beauchamp will be at dinner. . . ."

"No. . . ." Anne knew that he would not be there now.

"I shan't meet him again, I know. Not him. He'll be changed, if ever I see him again. I dare say he will have forgotten it. He won't be able to remember. . . . I shan't see you again, either."

"But to-night ?"

"Yes, to-night, of course. But to-night belongs to to-day. It's nothing new, only the end of this. Put a night's sleep to finish it, and then ? You can't afford to see me again. It would be asking for it. Oh, I know well enough. I'm not blind. You'll have to be strong again before you can risk it, and then you won't know why it was at all."

Anne did not answer. Again Miss Etheredge's words had the undefinable ring of certainty. It would have been trivial and false to protest.

"You feel that's true, don't you ?" said Miss Etheredge.

"Yes, I do." There were long pauses between question and answer, pauses with some compelling quality of their own, that stifled the very beginning of untruth.

"I like you for saying so. . . . It makes me feel that I shan't hate you like the rest."

"It was not I that said so, after all."

Anne felt that she was compelled to be honest about herself. Beside her companion now, she was small, and she wondered whether there was a real Anne. The feeling that she was less than Miss Etheredge left her without any being of her own. She was all or nothing. She could not hold

herself of a few minutes ago with herself now. The immediate past had become yet more foreign than the remote. And the present held so little, so pitifully little.

"Does it worry you to think that in a little while I'll be whining and raging again . . . just as I did yesterday?"

"I don't know," said Anne. "It's so different, so hard to imagine. No. . . . I don't think it does. . . . But that's because it doesn't seem real any more, I think that's the reason."

"I dare say. . . . Now, I don't know whether I envy you at all. Things are so certain. I'm too old to aim after—anything, dreams. I couldn't begin. I must have hesitated too long. 'Linger shivering on the brink and fear to launch away'—there's a hymn like that, isn't there? I suppose it's not what the swells'd call poetry; but there's something in it. I don't want. . . ." Again she hesitated. "Dreams any more. Just don't want them. I wish . . . your Mr. Beauchamp had come to see when I was like this. But I haven't been like this for a long while, perhaps never before.

"It won't last very long, either. You've just got to go away and it's all up, the whole damn thing busted. Not quite so sudden as that perhaps, but the beginning of the end.

"You ought to be going now, oughtn't you? You're quite right about going to that dinner. It's no use stopping here, is it? We've done all we can do."

"Yes, I think I'll go, now," said Anne. She rose and gathered her hat and the pins. As she put on her hat she said: "How very far away from life we are here." Then she corrected herself. "Very far away from the world."

"Listen by the window," said Miss Etheredge.

Together they went to the window. The low sun-blind bent their eyes downwards. Through a large lighted window below them they saw the moving shadow of some activity.

"It's quite dark now," said Anne.

She felt Miss Etheredge's arm close softly round her shoulder. While she looked at the moving shadow her eyes were slowly covered as with a curtain. The light in the window below spread and swam into a darkness. Then she heard a quick, dull tapping, that echoed up the dark well.

"It's a sculptor . . . an Italian," said Miss Etheredge.

"Good-bye," said Anne. The impulse came to them together. They kissed on the mouth.

A glimmer from a low gas flame escaped from the kitchen. Anne felt her way to the door, sliding her feet carefully before her, and groped for the latch. She tried the unfamiliar latch a long while with her fingers, neither expecting nor receiving aid. As it clicked open, she heard a voice from behind her, and waited, quite still.

"Ah, you've found it. . . . Good-bye." Then it changed, indefinitely changed. . . . "Yes, I shall be at the *Parthenon* to-night—outside."

While she made her way to the street, Anne asked much of the cool air and the people passing. She felt that these would bring her back to herself, or bring her some relief. She did not know what she expected from them. There was warm darkness and warm lights in the street. It was not inhospitable, and it was very real. But neither the warmth nor the hospitality were for her. She had been taken out of the world, out of life. Again she stood irresolutely upon the pavement corner. To her thought distance was overwhelming and unconquerable ; and as she glanced vaguely about her she saw the dim white of the prints in the long window opposite, and the vision of Dennis, with the strange droop in his shoulders, as Miss Etheredge had drawn him, took its place naturally before the window and moved slowly round the corner out of her sight.

She was not deceived. She saw the window opposite steadily all the while, and she saw that no one was there. Only in her mind was the picture of Dennis, shaped by Miss Etheredge's fingers ; but the picture seemed to free a



sudden understanding. Some weighty gloom, which she could not grapple while it had pressed upon her, dispersed. She was sad now, but calm and somehow herself.

Hailing a *fiacre* at the corner, she was driven back to the hotel. She had come out of an ordeal. She had emerged alive, where she might have been dead. The fatigue of deliverance weighed her steps as she climbed up the stairs.

Maurice was in an armchair. He had on his overcoat and his hat rested on his knee. She felt the sudden gladness in him as he jumped up.

"I thought you were never coming."

"I suppose I'm very late."

"No, it wasn't that I meant. . . ." He stopped suddenly, as a man before a precipice.

Anne hardly noticed it. She was not ready to feel things acutely again. Maurice held her hand.

"You are very tired, aren't you ? . . . That's Etheredge."

"I'll be ready in a second."

"Are you sure you want to come ? " asked Maurice, and even as he asked, the door was closing upon Anne.

## CHAPTER VIII

THEY were late. They were late nearly by a half an hour. It was so utterly unimportant to Maurice as he sat in a cab, close by Anne's side, that it tinkled pleasantly in his brain. The recollection of his day slid so completely away from him, that he answered, sincerely, with a puzzled ignorance of what he had really been doing, when Anne asked—

“What did you do all day?”

“Oh . . . I just wandered about,” he said. “I didn't go to see Boissonnier after all.”

He did not understand himself and Anne, sitting there close together. She seemed in a way so near to him . . . as if nothing had happened . . . as if something had happened to them both, rather. And yet there was something changed. A cloud of mutual kindness encompassed them. In it they were equal. He was grateful for it, even though he knew that it was not enough. It exacted nothing from him.

“What are you thinking about, Anne?”

Anne smiled at him, slightly turning her head, so gently, so full of kindness, that he felt a warm sadness like the relief of tears.

“All kinds of odd things,” she said.

He did not ask any more. What she said was sufficient, and he understood it, without knowing what she meant. He played with the two rings which were on her left hand for a little while, until the cab stopped, when he bent down and kissed it.

He was glad that he had done that while he led the way into the restaurant. In a corner he saw Ramsay and Wauchope and a woman whom he did not know.

"Dennis hasn't turned up," he said to Anne. "I wonder what has happened to him." Meanwhile he waved in response to Ramsay's salutation.

"You're late, Temple," he said when they had reached the table. "But we were, too, so it was as well."

Anne was speaking to Wauchope. They were both introduced to Miss Bathurst, a fresh-coloured lady who broke immediately into torrents of kindly talk. She had been hearing a great deal about Anne from Wauchope, she averred, who had been singing her praises, which happened seldom enough. She passed without pause to common-places of Paris, ending her first speech with the assurance that Anne really must live there, seeing that it was the only possible place.

"Have you decided when you are going yet?" Ramsay asked.

"No more idea than we had yesterday."

"Well, it doesn't matter very much."

"I thought you were off to the country," Maurice said to Wauchope, turning round on his chair to order food while he spoke.

"So did I. But I find I'm not opulent and free, like you."

"No?" Wauchope did not trouble him any more. He was only an incident. Even Ramsay was remote and trivial. He realised it suddenly, when Ramsay began to talk to him about the philosophy they had begun to discuss yesterday. Maurice answered his questions lucidly. He felt that he could touch the game with his fingers, and move the pieces.

"All I say, after all, is that if you start by thinking that you are there on one side, and everything else is out there on the other side, you can never get away from it. I am I and the world's the world may sound right enough; but seeing that everything one ever does or is ever likely to do is based on a quite different idea, it can't be so very valuable. The fact is that you never are isolated wholly,



and you can't possibly be isolated. It's only taking hold of the wrong end of the stick."

While he spoke his eyes turned to Wauchope, who sat beside him. He might have been listening. Fingering his thin moustache, he returned Maurice's look. His colourless blue eyes focussed through his pince-nez, and seemed more lifeless than ever. Except for a little upward twist of his thin lips, his face carried no expression. Strangely Maurice thought that Wauchope knew he had changed. Wauchope knew something about him. He was on the point of asking Wauchope point-blank: "What do you know about me, tell me?" But he could not do that. Ramsay there and Miss Bathurst, they would have found it strange. He had nothing at all to do with them. Perhaps he was to them exactly as they were to him. He marvelled that Ramsay should be interested in the words he was saying.

Miss Bathurst, pink and genial, was talking all the while to Anne. Anne should see old Berthelot's shop. All the things that were really being done in this art affair—the phrase was Ramsay's and it pricked Maurice's ears—were there, Badaud and Cochin and Picasso, and Berthelot himself was such a dear. And there was the *Salon d'Antan*. Anne had not seen that? It was wonderful, really wonderful, it was modern. She did not know Harry Borden? He was amazing. He smashed all the crockery at the Café d'Europe, put out every single light, before the *agents* got him; and Paul Bussy. . . . Miss Bathurst was indefatigable in enumerating the stupendous company, and Anne listened gently.

"Bill!" Miss Bathurst's voice, a pleasant voice with an echo of laughter, rose, "isn't Wauchope's picture of the tulips a masterpiece?"

"You should see that, Temple. It's really got something. The artist's getting somewhere." Ramsay smiled at Wauchope, and Maurice knew that Wauchope was glad, not for the praise, but for the smile.

"Yes," said Maurice mechanically. He was nearly

impelled to tell them that he would never see any pictures any more. They had for him neither use nor meaning.

And then he felt the unintelligible burden of his day. His memory was laden with every incident, and he had to support the weight in secret. He wished it undone. It seemed that even when he did not think about it, it was fermenting in hidden activity. He looked at Anne in the hope that she would read it in his eyes. She was listening to Miss Bathurst. He might have been freed from something of it. But now that Anne was not looking, he knew that he was weak. He would not tell her, but he wanted her to know. He recoiled from the sight of his own disintegration. "But I don't see how you can expect to be primitives in 1913. The world-consciousness, or whatever you call it, won't allow it; or if it does allow, it's no more than a protest, like throwing a brick through a plate-glass window. You talk about moderns—but really, there hasn't been a modern painter since Rembrandt. And even now he's a hundred years ahead of you."

Ramsay laughed. "You've vamped along in two years."

"Some two years are as good as a lifetime, after all."

"Yours are a bit better."

"Perhaps. . . . But you know you haven't succeeded in being a bit more modern than the people who began your movement. You've only made a theory out of their work that they never had themselves. . . ."

"Oh, you're an impossible reactionary."

Miss Bathurst was talking to Anne about Miss Etheredge. She gave them all advice of it by raising her too pleasant voice again.

"Bill. . . . Mrs. Cradock has been to see the lioness in her den." Ramsay raised his eyebrows and smiled vacantly. He was still attending to the desolate argument. "It's not everyone dares to do that," Miss Bathurst explained to Anne. "How did you get on with her? Better than we do, I'm sure."

"I found her very interesting," said Anne.

"Oh, she's *interesting*, right enough . . . and she's very clever."

"So I thought."

"She quarrels with everybody. I'm her deadly enemy just now."

"Oh. . . ." Anne thought that she was not so very deadly, and would have smiled, had not the conversation been so far away from her, no more than a little aimless whisper in her ears.

"I'm not sure I don't agree with him, Bill," said Wauchope.

Maurice was surprised a moment ; then he saw that the trailing discussion meant as little to Wauchope as it did to him. And Wauchope was a painter.

Wauchope leaned forward over the table and drew with his finger on the cloth. The smoke from his cigarette ascended in a swift stream, in colour like his eyes.

"I don't believe anything really matters to you, Bill." His thin lips slanted into his odd smile, and he watched his finger make curves. "Ah . . . it's rather like running a railway with you. . . ."

"How do you make that out ? "

"I don't make anything out. You have to be explained. You're really a phenomenon, that's all."

"You're too damnably obscure." Ramsay was not angry, but amused and expostulating. "What's the point of saying things if you're not going to explain them ? "

"That's your unfortunate prejudice. Running railways again—by the time-sheet."

Wauchope thought the same about Ramsay as Maurice did, then Maurice still felt that Wauchope knew something about him, that he did not want Wauchope nor anybody to know. Wauchope might even be able to see the visions of Madeleine that came into his mind unsought, of Madeleine hurt, Madeleine waiting, crowding recollections of old intimacies. He might even read the straggling words of



*Tu m'as cassais le cœur*, written lives ago, and being written again in his mind now.

While these pictures passed before his mind, he felt that his soul was open for eyes to see. He glanced up to look at Anne. She was still listening to Miss Bathurst, who leant with her plump arms folded upon the table. At that moment he had a clear sight of Anne. He could not hurt her any more; she was beyond his power to hurt. Nothing that he did would increase her pain, nothing would assuage it. That was why that kindness had enveloped them both on their way hither. He would have changed, he would have loved her and responded to her love, only she had passed beyond him now. He did love her now, he asserted to himself as he looked at her again, and sank his eyes to Wauchope's circling finger. Her fingers drummed again, her arm was stretched out again upon the table before his eyes. How he longed to kiss her hand, to kiss her lips, to be watched and mirrored by her eyes. How he wished that all these people were miles away, the whole world shattered out of sight. A dread foreboding sounded terribly through him, that he should never again be touched by her, never be held by her and forget everything. He could not look into the void without her, it was too close and too terrible. It was in him now. His mouth opened. He looked upwards suddenly, as one who sees a horror and cannot trust that the world is real.

"What's up, Temple?" said Ramsay. "You're looking queer."

Immediately, he looked queer no longer. "Oh, nothing," he said. "Have you ever tried to imagine eternity,—something that goes on for ever, without stopping, for ever and ever; something that doesn't move, but just remains, never changes?"

Ramsay shook his head.

"It gives you a nasty turn," said Maurice.

"So you get that kind of thing, too?" said Wauchope.

"Something wrong with you physically. . . . All kinds of rummy diseases . . ." said Ramsay.

"Yes, that's it," said Wauchope, still following his finger with his eyes.

Ramsay looked up and about him with wrinkled forehead, and the familiar half-smile, idly tapping with a five-franc piece on the table. "We'd better be going."

They strolled along the boulevard. Anne and Miss Bathurst led the way. Miss Bathurst was talking still; but occasionally she turned her head backward. "Don't lag behind so," she called. Then Ramsay looked up from his meditations for a second and dropped his head again. The luminous blue sky of a Paris night in spring arched overhead. The wide streets were desolate to Maurice; the café lights like distant beacons.

Wauchope broke the silence to say to him:

"That's a queer idea—eternity."

"Yes. . . ."

The idea of physical loneliness had gradually stolen through Maurice; his craving went forth into empty spaces. Even yet it seemed that it could not be so; that he was only trembling upon the brink of a void into which he never would be plunged. His thought could not hold a future so terrible. Before it, it drooped and was lifeless. Even his words were paralysed.

"Yes," he said again, "it's ghastly."

Wauchope was very close to him, desolate, like himself. He understood Wauchope now; but at the moment when he felt near to him he had a horror of contact. He could not acknowledge that they were alike. If he really were like Wauchope he would die.

Such were the furious, rhetorical ideas that surged through him, ideas of mortal death and clamorous defiance of inexorable destiny and silent endurance, ideas that he knew for empty swollen things, but could not put away. Either these must be in his mind or this utter desolation.

"I don't see why you should ever leave this place," said

Ramsay. "After all it is the only decent place to live in. Nobody really does care a damn about you here after all, so that you really are free in some sort of a way."

Maurice heard himself say: "But I've got my living to earn." The idea flickered into a half-reality and faded away. It came back contorted, revealing a sordid depth in himself that he could not believe. Without Anne he would have no money: he would have to go to—go to Cradock again. God alone knew what he would have to do. He could not think about that; but to be without Anne was real to him, now that it meant to be without money. That he could see and feel. "My God," he moaned to himself, striving to thrust the thought away, loathing the very mechanism of his mind that had brought it before him. It dissolved away. His mind and his body were one in passionate hunger to be enfolded in Anne's arms again.

"But couldn't you make some kind of a living from here? Don't people write about Paris in the Sunday papers? One of them would give you enough to live on."

"Yes, but they're not to be had for the asking."

"No? . . . I suppose it's only the R.A.'s who get them. . . ."

Wauchope beside Maurice said not a word. He was not even listening. He walked along with his hands in his pockets, tall, even though his head was bent downwards. He raised it as they drew near the café, and peered across the road.

"There's some kind of a fair on, isn't there?" He blinked at the changing light of the arc lamp. They stood still. Anne and Miss Bathurst had paused before them. The triumphant steam organ magnified a whistled tune into an orgy of music, that poured out with the flooding light. The café by the corner was dark against the brilliance that illumined only a circle of faces, and made the black shadow beyond them blacker, and solid as iron. As the horses swung swiftly round thin black streaks shot out from the darkness, and changed into coloured streamers.



"Isn't it splendid?" said Miss Bathurst. In her excitement she tiptoed up and down.

"Good things!" said Ramsay. "We'd better get a seat while we can."

They crossed the road. Maurice walked beside Anne.

"Are you cold, Anne?" he said. He could not speak to her now. He had nothing to say; words were empty and ridiculous.

"Not a bit," she said and looked at him. Though he could not see her eyes, he knew they were gentle and kind. He felt that in them, and desolation swept him again. One sole desire gripped him, to take her hand and walk hand in hand with her, like two little children across the road. "Like two little children," his mind repeated, for that was strangely part of his desire. He could not do it. Wide spaces were between them now.

He had something to say to her even now, he thought, walking by her side. He would have to say, naturally: "What would she have to drink?" It was a precious possession. While he sat down opposite her with his back to the roundabout, he was in a fever lest Ramsay should anticipate him.

"Anne," he said in a hard, thin voice, "what will you have to drink?"

Miss Bathurst, with a playful glance at him, bent across Anne beside her and whispered with amorous intensity:

"Qu'est ce que tu prends, ma chérie? . . ." Then relapsing into her chair. "That's the way it should be done, Mr. Temple."

Maurice stared at her, aghast. It was the finger of destiny. Miss Bathurst, uneasy before his eyes, turned and spoke to Ramsay, ordering her drink. Maurice had frightened her.

"I'll have some coffee," said Anne. The patient quietness of her voice hurt him. She looked at him, and it seemed to him that he was not there, that she was looking at an unreal thing. He looked back at her, and his eyes were like insentient lenses of glass, that reflected and did

not see. Anne's gaze shifted to the roundabout behind him. He saw himself in the future weeping, calling upon her who would never come to him, never comfort him. He was a stranger, a statue in his own sight ; he saw himself to be, and felt nothing, save that he could not feel. But that future was fixed and ineluctable.

What he saw he accepted without rebellion or questioning. He was weary and incapable now.

And the words that he had to say to her were doubly precious. They shaped upon his lips into elaborate courtesies.

"You would like the coffee really hot ; it's nearly always cold."

"Yes, please," said Anne.

He was nervous of no waiter now, and he rapped sharp and loud upon the table. The waiter hurried to him. Maurice insisted, as he had never insisted before, that his bidding should be done, and for the first time he knew that it would be done. Then he sank back into himself. He had nothing to say. The sound of the organ, shrieking *Sur les Ponts de Paris* above the grinding machinery, was acceptable.

"Won't you come for a ride ?" said Miss Bathurst to Anne. Quivering with impatient excitement, she rose from her seat as she asked. Anne rose too, and they passed together between the tables into the crowd. Ramsay's hands were clasped between his knees, and his body bent close to the table, where he sat next to Miss Bathurst. He raised his eyes, wrinkling his forehead, and smiled. Then he shook his head suddenly. Miss Bathurst had beckoned to him from the crowd. Wauchope sprawled sideways, resting his head in the palm of his hand, watching the grog which he monotonously stirred.

Maurice shifted round in his chair to watch. The two women had disappeared into the shadow of the crowd. Miss Bathurst emerged and ran up a few steps on to the platform and waved to them. Anne followed her. They waited for the swinging horses to stop : while they waited

they were festooned with streamers from the crowd. Miss Bathurst jerked her hand out continually to catch the streamers in their flight.

A basket full of the coloured papers, rolled up like ribbons in a draper's shop, came under his eyes. He regarded them vaguely for an instant, and looked upwards to see a woman urging him to buy. Her eyes were turned towards the roundabout, and she looked down again at her basket only when he took a handful and paid the money. As she moved to the next table he got up and threaded his way through the people. On the pavement he was arrested by a voice.

"Oh, here you are!" It was Miss Etheredge.

"Hullo," he said.

"Going to throw papers with the little boys?"

"Yes." He looked up at her.

"Why, what's the matter with you?" She took hold of his arm; it was limp and unresisting in her hand.

"Nothing. . . . I'm only a bit tired."

"Little boys shouldn't be let loose in this wicked town," she mocked, but kept hold of his arm: and so they stood close together on the edge of the crowd, looking towards the horses.

"Is that Miss Bathurst up there? . . . and Mrs. Cradock? . . . it is . . . yes, Miss Bathurst would be Bohemian, thoroughly Bohemian. Give me one of those."

He held out his handful. As the horse that Miss Bathurst rode, side saddle, facing the crowd, clutching ineffectually at the streamers, intoxicated with delight, came round to view again Miss Etheredge launched her missile. It fell feebly on the edge of the platform.

"No, I'm no good at this. . . ." She looked round at the café tables. "Who's there?"

"Ramsay, Wauchope, Anne, Miss Bathurst and me."

"Mr. Beauchamp isn't there?"

"No. . . . I haven't seen him since last night."

The organ and the horses stopped. Neither Miss Bathurst



nor Anne dismounted. Anne rode in a monstrous white swan, alone, leaning backwards; she never looked to right or left. Miss Etheredge and Maurice moved forwards as the people crowded behind them. Out of the general sea of faces shot quick arms, and above the general tumult sounded loud explosive laughs. The horses and chariots swung so swiftly and lightly round that they blurred before Maurice's eyes. One thing alone was steady before him, the figure of a man in brilliant white shoes who stood in the dark centre of the roundabout, with his back against a column of mirrors, moving his feet in little sideways steps, instinctively, so that he was always turned towards them. Anne soared in her swan for an instant, sank again, and was gone.

He turned round suddenly and looked behind him. Miss Etheredge felt him start and turned with him. She saw only a horizon of uplifted faces looking intently before them.

"Someone you know?" she asked.

"I thought I recognized a voice . . ." he said.

"Where?"

"Oh, somewhere behind . . . but it was a mistake."

The organ and the horses stopped again. The great machine waited and throbbed and sang. The pair of riders reappeared on the platform and descended the steps. Maurice and Miss Etheredge edged their way out of the crowd, pausing on the pavement.

"Is there a table near you?"

"The next one." Maurice pointed to a round table next to Anne's, divided from hers by a gangway.

"Good. . . I mustn't be too close." She went to it, and Maurice to his own seat, half-turned towards the roundabout.

Miss Bathurst saw Miss Etheredge and turned without a word to her seat.

"So you enjoyed that, Jane?" asked Ramsay.

"It was fine," she said. While she went on in praise of roundabouts she glanced uneasily behind her at the vacant

seat. She felt that it was a dereliction that Anne should sit beside Miss Etheredge. Miss Etheredge, while she spoke to Anne, was looking continually to the other table and sketched ostentatiously in her book. Anne, with her hands in her muff, leant forward and watched her.

"Etheredge is immortalising you, Wauchope," said Miss Bathurst.

Wauchope was still sprawling beside the table with his head sideways upon his hand. He was scraping the bottom of his glass with a spoon.

"Well, she'll do it if anybody will," he said.

Miss Bathurst had not expected that answer. She went on talking briskly to Ramsay, who listened, half-attentive, watching the crowd in front of him. Occasionally, she glanced at Maurice, staring at the curtained window of the café.

"Did you have a nice dinner?" Miss Etheredge asked Anne.

"Yes, I suppose so. I didn't notice it very much."

"Miss Bathurst did the honours—of Paris?" Miss Etheredge pretended to be engrossed in her sketching, and did not wait to be answered. "She gets it all from Bill. . . . I said your Mr. Beauchamp wouldn't be here, didn't I?"

"Yes. . . . I didn't expect him, myself."

"Temple doesn't seem to be very happy. But then we aren't exactly bursting with joy. . . . What does he want to go and sit there for?" She called his name across the gangway, and he came over and sat by them, with his hands in his pockets.

"What have you done with your friend?" asked Miss Etheredge.

"My friend . . . ?" he repeated, bewildered. "Oh, you mean Dennis. I don't know where he is."

"Getting rid of his money at Montmartre. That's a thing we all do alone. It's more economical. Unless we can do it with someone else's money. . . . Where are those ribbons you had?"

He thrust his hand absently into his pocket. "I wonder what I did with them?" he said.

"I met him at the corner of the crowd there. He had a handful to shy at you," she said to Anne. "Put 'em on the table."

He spread the rolls of coloured paper on the table before her, slowly, as though it gave him pleasure to arrange them in an ordered pattern. Anne looked at them. To her they seemed strange, unaccountable things.

"Aren't you going to get me something to drink? You're not such a nice, thoughtful boy as you used to be."

While he beckoned a waiter, he nodded his head slowly. "I suppose I'm different," he said. Miss Etheredge stopped sketching and looked at him. She took up one of the rolls of paper from the table, put it down, and looked at him again. "You're too young," she said, "for Paris. Don't you think so?" She turned to Anne, who seemed to be surprised at the question and smiled as though she did not comprehend it.

"I must go and say 'How d'ye do' to my friends. I'm very polite by nature." Miss Etheredge put her book down on the table. "You're not to look at it. I'll have a *vermouth cassis*."

They both watched her as she went across to the others, looking steadily away from them. She greeted Ramsay, who shook her hand. Miss Bathurst fixed her eyes upon the table, shrinking back into her seat. They saw Wauchope raise himself and hold out his hand to her, unexpectedly. She, unexpecting, made as if to take it, and then drew back. He let his hand fall limp and flat upon the table.

Anne turned away and began to finger the rolls of paper. "Did you buy these?" she said.

He nodded. Somehow he could not answer the tone of her question in words. His eyes were fixed on her fingers which held a roll poised between.

"You didn't throw any?"

"No," he said. The word came easily, but from a



distance, from other lips than his own. "I wish . . ." the unfamiliar tone that made the words so distant cut him short. Anne looked at him, and the sight of the vague pain in his face, pain that would not take shape, save in an expression of his eyes that seemed to be frightened of nothing definite, was so sharp a stab that it would have killed her. It touched a hidden place and was gone. The whole world of her sight and thought became grotesque. She wanted to laugh. She felt she must laugh.

"No, it doesn't matter," he said. His head bent down. He tilted his chair backwards and looked at the ground beneath. Anne looked across at Miss Etheredge. She seemed to be making large fantastic gestures towards Wauchope. Maurice's hat seemed to cut one-half from her vision. It was monstrous and huge. She held her handkerchief tight in her hand for fear that she should laugh at that.

It suddenly tilted upwards. She could see Maurice tighten all over. The very chair in which he sat seemed to tremble with a sudden rigidity. A woman talking loudly swept by her back. She saw the black sleeve brush his neck, and as the woman passed by him up the gangway into the café, she saw him look after her, and the tautness in him relax. He leant over the table, sliding his elbow against Miss Etheredge's sketchbook, and began to stand the rolls of coloured paper each on end, balancing them carefully upon the edge of paper that they should not roll away. Anne knew that he had thought the woman was Madeleine.

"What was it you were going to say, Morry?" she asked. He raised himself. He was white, and a weak, pitiful smile passed unsteadily over his lips. Anne felt that her eyes were brimming with her uncontrollable anguish for laughter. She clenched her handkerchief inside her muff with all her strength.

"Oh," he said with the same smile, "it was too silly, too silly. . . ."

"What was it?" she said, sharply.

He looked away from her eyes at her muff. "I was only going to ask if you'd come for a ride with me. . . . There are some motor-cars there with two seats. I saw them. . . . It's too silly. It doesn't matter now."

"Of course I'll come," she said. "But you don't want to go now?"

"Do you?"

"Yes." She said it as though it hurt her, and rose. He pushed back his chair and followed her.

Miss Etheredge stopped Anne in the gangway.

"You're going to have a ride—together?"

Anne broke into a quiet laughter. While she did so she caught hold of Miss Etheredge by the arm, and leaned for a moment heavily against her, or she would have fallen.

"Only, it's so ridiculous, so foolish," she said. She held herself upright.

"Come on, Morry," she said.

He came to her side and took her arm. "Is anything wrong?" he said.

"Nothing . . . nothing at all . . . it's just excitement . . . come on . . . it's riding with you in a motor-car . . . on a roundabout."

"I'm coming, too," said Miss Etheredge. Together, with Anne in the middle, they descended to the pavement and into the crowd.

On the top of the wooden steps they waited for the roundabout and the music to stop. To Maurice the horses and the cars flew by in a maddened dream. To Anne it was as though nothing had ever been real before, save those empty seats that swung past her, and that music shrieking in the air about her. Already they were festooned with streamers.

"I'm going to have a swan," said Miss Etheredge. "I think a swan would be very becoming to me. It suits my personality."

Into Maurice's mind continually thrust those perfect

rolls of paper on the table behind them. They were being wasted.

Miss Etheredge's swan was in front of their motor-car. As they sat down, they saw her gather the reins of her bird. Anne laughed. As the moan of the engine died away into the swelling noise of the organ, she was laughing still. Maurice looked at her. They could not speak for the noise. She pointed to Miss Etheredge holding the reins of her swan and laughed again. An emptiness that had been in Maurice seemed to swell and swallow him up. The whole world rushed away from him with the roundabout. He felt sick in his body, and waited through an age for it to stop. He forgot that Anne was beside him. He saw only two hands that clasped his wrists while he held the dummy steering wheel.

The horses and the music stopped.

"The swan would have been all right if it hadn't started bucking," said Miss Etheredge.

"It's the last time for me," said Anne.

Maurice followed them down the stairs into the blackness of the crowd. They sat down together at the table.

"You aren't very enlivening, either of you," began Miss Etheredge. Her fingers played nervously round the stem of her glass. "We couldn't be called a cheerful party, could we? What a pity your Mr. Beauchamp isn't here. We might go off to the *Olympia* together, five in a fiacre. Wauchope would come. He's sad enough. You might get it out of him, Anne." It was the first time that Miss Etheredge had called her Anne. "It might be Netta. I'd like to know. Go and try to get it out of him."

Anne picked up a roll of the paper. While she shook her head she put it in her muff.

"No, I suppose you couldn't. Wouldn't you like to know? But you don't know Wauchope. There's something fine at the bottom of him. All that coldness, all that staring at you—that's only the outside. Underneath there's something fine, I tell you. All that's only to prevent



you hurting him. He's just like a child beneath, frightened. It comes out when he's like this. Somebody gets through the armour and it's all up. He's worth fifty Bills and a thousand Bathursts. I'd like to know what it was that did it to-night. Was he like that at dinner ? ”

“ Yes, he was,” said Maurice.

“ How do you know ? ”

“ I spoke to him.”

“ What did you say ? ”

“ I've forgotten . . . something that I was feeling. . . . He said he felt like that. . . . Perhaps he didn't say it, but I knew.”

“ So you've found it out, have you ? You're growing up. You found it out through that girl of yours. What was her name ? Madeleine. I tell you what, Mrs. Cradock, he'll be getting quite interesting soon.”

The words hovered in Maurice's mind. Yes, he was quite interesting. He was a man with a tragedy. He was different from all those other people. He was making a past now. A strange question confronted him. “ How long do interesting people live ? ” They can't keep it up for many years. No, he wasn't interesting at all. The whole structure of his tragedy dissolved. There was Madeleine, crying so quietly that you could not see the tears before they had fallen.

“ I wonder what Netta's done to him—or what he's done to Netta. She'll come and tell me one of these days, but I want to know now . . . I'll go and ask him.” Miss Etheredge suddenly rose half-way up from her chair and sank back again. “ No, I'd better not. I can't.”

“ I'll go then,” said Anne.

“ No . . . no . . . I didn't really mean it. He won't tell you. He can't tell you in front of those two.”

“ I'll see,” said Anne. Miss Etheredge followed her with her eyes, as she went across and sat by Wauchope's side. They began to talk. Miss Bathurst leant slowly forward to listen, pretending to be the more engrossed in Ramsay's

diagrams on the table. Anne felt, while she spoke, that the ball of paper was cutting into her hand. Miss Etheredge saw Wauchope change his seat. From opposite Miss Bathurst he moved away to the little round table where Maurice and Anne had sat.

"Why don't you say anything?" Miss Etheredge asked Maurice. "Can't think of anything clever?"

"No."

"What is it then, for God's sake? Thinking of the old days when we all loved you, because you were so young and thought yourself so clever? Or are you just hating me?"

He shook his head. "I don't believe I ever did hate you," he said. "What is there to say?"

"Quite a lot of things, seeing I'm interested." She was looking at her sketch-book, drawing again, and he was watching her. "I always like to know the history of these little affairs. When did you meet Mrs. C.? What did you say to her? How did you manage it? Is she charming in bed? Tell me all that, and I'll be delighted, really."

"Yes, I suppose you would. But we'll leave all that to some other time. Or I'll write you a nice long letter. Don't you think you might tell me something about yourself instead? . . . It doesn't matter very much, anyway."

"Or you can tell me when she's going to leave you or you're going to leave her. Are you going to live happily ever after, and where are you going to do it? You'll have to do that very soon. It's not safe for you to be roaming about, without a sense of humour."

"You don't think so?"

"I'm quite sure of it. . . . You're too damn selfish altogether," she burst out. "You'd suck the life out of anybody and never give anything back. You're blind, you selfish little beast, you can't see it. You think you're a damned hero, because you go about and everybody gives you things, like pouring water into a pitcher with a hole in it. You can't see *that*, can you?"

"Yes, I can," he said. "But what's the use? I've learnt something about myself, don't worry. I know all you say is true, but that don't change it. D'you think I get any fun out of it?"

She put her hand on his arm. "We're not the kind of people to go for each other. That's true. You've changed. I haven't seen you for a long time, that's all. You wouldn't come to see me this afternoon. Why didn't you? You're not frightened of me, are you?"

"No. . . . I don't think I am. I don't know why, but if I came, I should come alone."

"It didn't matter. Mrs. C. and I had a nice intimate conversation. Oh! very nice and intimate. That's why I'm such an angel now. You'd have spoilt that for certain. Don't you see I'm behaving very well indeed? But what's the matter with you?"

"I don't know."

"Are you hard up? Because . . ."

He shook his head.

"Well. . . . Let's go and finish up these ribbons. They'll be shutting up the show soon." She gathered up half of them in her hands and he followed with the rest. They stood at the edge of the crowd. The man in the white shoes came forward to the top of the steps and shouted out that it was the last turn but one. "*On ferme à minuit.*" The whole crowd seemed to surge forward on to the steps. Into the swans, on the horses, swarmed pairs. Into the motor-cars crowded fours. It took a long while for the men to collect the money. The machine revolved more slowly under the new weight. Even the organ seemed to groan painfully.

"Good God!" Maurice heard Miss Etheredge say abruptly, and then to him, "There's the beautiful Bowley. . . . And Netta, too, the beauty." She was pointing to a pair on a horse, slowly swinging out of sight, moving faster while he watched. The woman wore a round black cap that might have been of astrakhan. It showed plainly against the long white woollen coat which she wore tight



round her slim body. She was kicking her legs outward, for the admiration of the crowd. The crowd admired. They roared out "Bravo" and "Bis," and showered her with paper garlands. Of the man Maurice could see no more than that he was fat and wore check trousers, and sat with a nervous firmness upon his horse. He had no brass pillar to hold on to.

"No, she's only half what she can be now. But you can see she's different from the rest. Why even in the way she kicks out her legs she's got personality. What on earth does she want with Bowley? I don't know. 'Bowley's a dar-r-ling,'" she quoted.

The two flew by again and again. Suddenly Miss Etheredge threw a roll of ribbon. She had not unfastened it. It travelled like a stone and hit the wooden horse beneath Netta's feet.

"You have to undo those things before you throw them. Else they don't spread. They might hurt somebody."

"I knew that," she said. "Well, no luck. Let's finish 'em up." She threw them one after the other, quickly, aiming at no particular mark. "Come on," she said, turning back to the café. "She can go to hell for all I care. . . . Anne's still getting a confession out of Wauchope. . . . Remember," she said quickly, "if you're ever stranded here and you don't know where to go there's always a room where I live."

Wauchope passed them in the gangway. Without pausing he raised his hat to Miss Etheredge. "Good night," he said. "Good night, Temple." Maurice watched him until he was round the corner and hurrying down the boulevard. He felt that he could have spoken to Wauchope, that Wauchope had something to say to him. The unexpected address—"Good night, Temple"—left a pang of regret behind it. Now he would never hear what Wauchope had to say.

"Netta makes him pay for it. She's a devil, when she's like this. Oh, he's got something to go through. The fool!"

Miss Bathurst was standing ready to go. Ramsay was paying his bill. She asked Anne if she was coming too. "We go the same way, I think—down the hill."

Maurice went back to pay.

"Well, I'd better go home too," said Miss Etheredge. "Good night, Mrs. Cradock. It's been enough for one day. Good night."

"But aren't you coming with us?"

"No. . . . It wouldn't do. Miss Bathurst would object. Not at all desirable company to keep nowadays, you know—*déclassé*, absolutely *déclassé*." She was just within earshot of Miss Bathurst.

"Oh, I forgot," said Anne. "Which way are you going?"

"Up the hill for me, turn to the right, and *down* again. . . . I don't see why she shouldn't go the long way for once. . . . But I won't suggest it. I wonder what she would do if I went to speak to her."

Maurice caught them up on the pavement. The great arc light of the roundabout went out, just as a big clock began to strike the hour of midnight. They were very punctual. Two *agents* stood together in the middle of the square watching. That was the reason. Some men, faint shadows in the darkness, were pulling a tall tarpaulin that gradually moved round the side of the roundabout and made it look like a tent. The white shoes of the man who had stood in the middle were conspicuous. They seemed to twinkle in the shadow of the tarpaulin. Out in the light of the moon, a woman in a long grey coat, with a black scarf about her neck and her hands down in her deep pockets, watched them with a familiar interest.

"Morry"—Anne spoke to him—"go with the others. Explain that I'm going to walk home with Miss Etheredge. I shan't be very long."

"All right. . . ." He paused to say good-bye to Miss Etheredge.

"Trot along home like a good boy," she said, "and

don't get lost. You can give my love to Miss Bathurst, if you like."

The other two had walked on very slowly. They were now at the corner of the boulevard. He walked after them. At the corner he looked back, and saw Anne and Miss Etheredge on the other side of the square. While he looked, they disappeared into the shadow.

"You're coming by yourself?" asked Miss Bathurst. Maurice explained.

"Haven't seen much of you to-night," said Ramsay, "and when I have you've been very quiet. Getting sick of talking at last?"

"No, it's not that. I've been thinking about something else most of the time. I can't do two things at once."

"You're not tired of Paris?" said Miss Bathurst. "I never think what other people might feel. It seems to me wonderful always. But it might be tiring if you aren't actually painting, I suppose."

"No, I always like it. I like walking down the streets. As a matter of fact, I think I never do get tired here. Anyhow, it's a place I always remember vividly."

"That's true," said Ramsay. "There's something clean about the place that sticks in the mind. . . . Besides, you left your heart behind here once, after all. That makes a difference, I should imagine."

Miss Bathurst laughed, as though she enjoyed laughing.

"Yes, I dare say it does make a difference," said Maurice.

"I should have thought so," laughed Miss Bathurst.

"What's Wauchope's address?" asked Maurice.

"42 rue de la Grande Fermière. . . . Why? Do you want to see him?"

"I thought I might go to see him one day—that's all. I don't suppose I ever shall."

"It's a bit too late now, at any rate. He's going away by the train at twenty past twelve. He was running to catch it then. But he only just made up his mind in time. It took him one minute to decide. He was off well inside it."



"It was just as though your wife had advised him. Really it was," said Miss Bathurst. "He hadn't any idea he was going before. He was arranging a party with us for Thursday, wasn't he, Bill?"

"Yes, more or less. . . . You were doing the arranging. . . . He's gone off, anyhow."

The pain which Maurice had felt when Wauchope passed him stung him more. Wauchope had passed clean away now. He might write to him, now that he had the address. But what was he to write about?

"You go over the bridge, don't you?" said Ramsay. "We go along here. . . . Well, when am I going to see you again? You were very unsatisfactory at dinner. . . ."

"And when are you coming to see me?" chimed Miss Bathurst. "I've heard you're so brilliant. You must give me a chance to make quite certain."

"When do you think you're going away from Paris, anyhow? . . . Oh, you said you didn't know. . . . You're terribly vague."

"I'm thinking of going to-morrow morning," said Maurice on an impulse.

"That's silly . . . what the devil for, might I ask?"

"Not trying to imitate Wauchope?" said Miss Bathurst.

Maurice looked at her hard. The words seemed to have stung him. He discovered nothing in her face however.

"Not that I know of," he answered her. "I think I am, all the same. You know we're used to the country, and even Paris begins to get on Anne's nerves. It's the noise."

"He's not really going," said Miss Bathurst. Maurice did not worry about her any more after that.

"I should think it over at any rate," said Ramsay, "and if you do change your mind, you might as well come and see me to-morrow afternoon."

"Well, I'll say good-bye in case."

They said "Good-bye," and Maurice hurried over the bridge, walking as though he had no time to lose.

## CHAPTER IX

MAURICE's purpose was clear in his mind while he walked along. It was clearer and more compelling because it was immediate and practical, something to be done and to be done now. He must get away from the hotel before Anne returned. Then . . . then he would go to Lesdigues to find Madeleine. His walk passed into a trot, from a trot into a steady run. That he should hail a cab never came into his mind. The continual and increasing bodily movement, as he ran, satisfied his yearning to act, and he felt nothing save that yearning and its satisfaction. Outside the hotel he dropped into a walk again. He accepted an instinctive warning not to attract attention, and he passed the ambush of the lighted bureau with brisk intention, but unhurried.

He glanced at the clock when he began to pack. It was twenty minutes past twelve. His eyes returned to it constantly while he gathered together his possessions. They suggested themselves to him in the order of their importance. Deliberately he left behind all the newly-bought clothes that he had brought with him from London. Money—he counted nine hundred francs from his drawer—such of his old clothes as were clean—for these he rummaged carefully, replacing the new things which he had disturbed. These included in a small bag, he looked once more at the clock. Twenty-six minutes past. All Anne's familiar toilet things were on the table. He sat down on the couch in front of them and stared. Then he bent his head in his hands and passed his fingers nervously over his forehead. The touch seemed to determine his first and only hesitation. He caught hold of the bag and went downstairs. During the brief moment of descent he debated

in himself whether he should speak with the bureau. They might suspect him. He decided against it, and passed quickly outside the hotel, along the street into the Place de l'Opéra.

Then it was that the desire to see Madeleine took hold of him. He welcomed its urgent monopoly of his mind. It was more than a desire. It was a justification that would not fail him in his necessity. He was filled with a sense of triumph and right as he mounted into an open fiacre and was borne softly with a pleasant tinkling of bells to the Gare d'Orléans. He leaned back and let the darkened streets ripple quietly before his eyes. Madeleine came gently into his vision. Now it was as though they had never parted. Two years fell away from him like the curtain of a dream. Already he was bathed in the happiness of loving reconciliation. *C'est toi, mon bien aimé. . .* A new and unexpected thought came like a spark of added warmth and radiantly glowed within him, slowly fanned. Perhaps he had a child. Perhaps she had lied when she wrote to him to say that the danger was over. She would have done that to hold him then. The nightmare of his old life was now the promise of the new. A slow and steady certainty crept into this thought. And then he was sad because the child would now be nearly two years old. He had not been there while it was a tiny baby. He could see Madeleine holding it to her. He remembered how she had spoken on that day when she said so deliberately and quietly: "Je crois que tu ne m'aimes pas. . . Si j'avais seulement un petit Maurice, je serais content. . ." His tenderness was sweet, but near to tears when the cab stopped outside the station.

There would be no train to Lesdigues until half-past seven in the morning. But surely there were fast trains in the night-time. Surely, but Lesdigues . . . "c'est un tout petit village, monsieur. Les rapides ne s'arrêtent jamais, jamais . . . Naturellement." For a few minutes he walked up and down the great hall. It was chilly in the dead hours.



His feet unduly echoed ; and he was glad to come out into the street again. He wondered for a moment what he should do, and then joyfully remembered that there was a café in the Market that never closed at all. It was made for such as he. Again the petulant fever of his impatience to board the train that would take him to Madeleine subsided when he had a definite end to accomplish. He walked quickly along.

When he entered, the noise surprised him, for he had in an hour forgotten his familiarity with these things. A pale, round-faced man with yellow hair twanged a loud guitar almost under his chin, while he stood, bewildered, in front of the door. The man looked at him, made way for him, and watched him while he chose a seat in the corner, but the guitar twanged irrevocably on. When Maurice looked up again the man was still looking at him, not with curiosity but with the indifferent unoffending stare of habit. Then he tucked the guitar under his arm and went to a table opposite. Someone had asked him to have a drink.

The sense that the time of waiting here would be interminably long gradually stole into Maurice. He was frightened of waiting, for then he weakened in body and soul. Somehow he must fill up the long hours. He asked for a pen and paper, and sat tracing dreamy lines and fragments of words, with his coffee by his side. He tried to reckon his situation, to see himself plainly and to pass a verdict upon what he had done, but he could not. The vision of Madeleine's surprise, her joy, her embrace flooded back over the feeble barrier of his thought, which sought to hold it away and judge. But those continual visions did not fill him completely. An infinitesimal vein of doubt flowed with them. He did not know what it was ; he only knew it was there, because the tender triumph he had felt a little while ago was not complete. Perhaps he had changed ; perhaps he could not be the same as he had been any more. Two years must mean something. Yet when he tried to find wherein two years had brought any change, he could

find nothing. He had been hungry all the while for Madeleine, he said, and the experience of two years fell empty away because the hunger had never been filled.

The twanging of the guitar rounded out his conclusions. The man began to sing *Dodo, mon homme, fais vit' dodo*. Maurice looked up to find the indifferent glance ranging about him, as his pen made inconsequent characters upon the paper. Under that detective eye he squared himself instantly to write. He had been meaning to write to Anne. He wrote the vague superscription: "Paris, Wednesday," with laborious care. The musician's glance was to him as a schoolmaster's, and his own writing that of a copy-book. "Anne, darling," he began, and hesitated. That was a dishonest address: it was unfair to Anne. He crossed it out delicately with a network of thin lines, so that Anne could see also what he had written. He contemplated this for a little while, and then crumbled the paper up and threw it angrily to the floor. Could he do nothing cleanly, honestly, once for all? He wrote the superscription again, and continued slowly but without hesitation.

"I went away as soon as I got back to the hotel. I am going to Madeleine. I couldn't tell you why I have gone, because although I had to, I don't know why. But you know much better than I do. I may be coward enough to want to come back. I may write you letters. For God's sake never answer them. But I know you never will. You don't know how sad I am, now that I've written that. I wasn't sad before.

"I thought that it was because you were older than me. Now I know it is because I am a coward. Good-bye."

He poised his pen before the words: "You don't know how sad I am, now that I've written that. I wasn't sad before," as the impulse came to strike them out. No, it was true. Everything in the letter was true. He felt that at the last he had given a little thing completely to Anne.

The swing-doors beside him swung noisily open. A fat man entered boisterously, clapping his hands together.

They were large, flabby hands, but he brought them together lustily and for their flabbiness they made a prodigious noise. He wore a small bowler hat tilted backwards upon a close mat of curly grey hair. His wide face was loose-lipped and sensual; but there was a pleasant twinkle in his small eyes. Even the cheerful blatancy of his entrance was comfortable. A younger man was behind him, dressed in breeches and gaiters. His round, ruddy cheeks and fresh stupid eyes were rightly crowned by an old tweed hat, whose short brim sagged carelessly round it. His fingers were in his pockets, and for the essential straw he was chewing the stem of a yellow rose. He edged his face to the side of the fat man's shoulder and stared diffidently at the bar in front of him.

"Philippe, mon vieux," roared the fat man. The musician smiled as though the phenomenon were familiar to him.

"C'est toi, Victor?" came the stentorian response from behind the polished partitions.

Philippe appeared. Unexpectedly he was spruce and slim, with black hair and notable black moustaches. One would have thought him incapable of the vigorous welcome with which he shook his Victor's portentous hand.

"One devil—two devils—want supper. Tu en as de bon?"

Philippe laughed. It must have been an old-standing joke, for it was not at all funny. The fat man sat down heavily on Maurice's long bench before the table next to his. The younger immediately slipped into a chair opposite. Philippe and Victor talked very quickly. At the end Philippe's smile incredibly broadened.

"Pas de blague?"

"Les voici."

The fat man pulled a clumsy purse out of his pocket, and took out a small rouleau. "On gagne quelquefois, mon vieux."

"Je vais avoir de belles songes. Au revoir. Mais tu



boiras du bon. Je me'y occupe et puis '*Dodo, mon homme.*'"

"Et tu en as du meilleur au lit . . ." the fat man roared. Philippe disappeared, more discreetly smiling.

The fat man's little eyes roamed leisurely about the room. They travelled comfortably over Maurice, over the musician, and rested benignly for a while upon two women and two men who sat close to the counter. There were no others in this part of the café.

"Très peu de monde," he said to the younger, and then, robustly translating. "Damn poor crowd to-night." He ate with conviction. The waiter put two bottles of champagne by his side. The fat man regarded the label ruminatively. "That's a'right," he said.

That he was English solved the problem of the younger man, though Maurice speculated what he was doing here. But the fat man was not so easily settled. Frenchmen did not speak such English, nor Englishmen such French. He could not imagine what they were; and his curiosity only began to pass away while he contemplated his letter again. He addressed and sealed an envelope and put it in his pocket. The musician brought round a plate. The fat man clattered a five-franc piece on to it. There was no ostentation in the noise; it was natural to him. He whispered something into the man's ear, and he laughed and nodded. Maurice could do no less than to give him a franc now.

The guitar began again. The fat man paused in his eating, which was nearly done, to listen. The younger leaned his arm over the back of his chair and watched the playing, as though it were a miracle, familiar, but still a miracle. Maurice could not recognise the tune, until the fat man waved his hand, and said: "Come on" to his companion, and began to sing, as he would have sung:—

"Good-bye, my bluebell,  
Farewell to you . . ."

Several times he sang it, with the same gesture and gusto.

The younger man was shyer, but he was singing too. Maurice could not help joining in. He leaned his head on his hand and drew on the paper before him while he sang.

The fat man's "bravo" and "bis" were like his singing; but the player shook his head. Victor gave him a friendly nod, and then slid himself heavily along the seat.

"You're English, ain't you?" he asked Maurice.

"Yes."

"Then come along here and have a drink with us. It's good fizz." He winked. "You always get the best if you don't pay for it, wimmen *and* wine. . . ."

There was no refusing Victor. Even though Maurice did not really want to refuse it, he would have done, had the invitation come from anyone but Victor. How he had always hated men of Victor's type; but Victor was different, somehow genuine beneath his genial and capacious ruffianism. He slid along beside him.

"That young gentlemen," said Victor, "is Mr. Walter Thompson. He's as innocent as 'e looks."

Walter reddened, shook Maurice by the hand, and chewed at the rose stem. "Don't mind 'im," he said. "E's like that."

"My name's Temple," said Maurice.

"What's your job?"

"I don't know. . . . I can't make up my mind."

"You came 'ere to make it up?" Victor winked, by way of reply to his own question. "A drink 'd do you good. Nothing like fizz to see you through till the morning." Victor interrupted his conversation to make a complicated sign to one of the women opposite. Maurice did not understand it; but the woman laughed and Victor reverberated.

"You wouldn't guess what I am. French or English?"

"No, I couldn't tell at all."

"Oh, 'e's a froggie," said Walter.

"You 'aven't seen one like me before, I bet."

Maurice shook his head.

"Ever been to Maisons Lafitte?"

"No."

"You should. Go there and ask anybody who's Victor. You're a toff, ain't you? Down on your luck?" He stroked the shoulder of Maurice's coat. "By gum, that's natty. You got that in London, for a cert. Don't tell me."

"Yes, I did."

"Well, what' you doing 'ere—alone? Not the place to sit in a corner, is it?"

"Why not? It's very comfortable. . . . But I'm waiting to catch a train."

"That's more like. So'm we, ain't we, Wally? We'll catch the b——, by God, we will." He laughed immoderately, and generously filled Maurice's glass. Himself, he drank heroically. "Garçon, encore une bouteille, la même chose."

"Il n'en reste plus, malheureusement, monsieur."

"Good old Phil. I told you so, Wally. Gave us 'is best, all 'e 'ad. 'E's a pal. Alors . . ." He chose a certain Mumm. . . . "Cana of Galilee," he said. "That was t'other way about, though, wasn't it, sir. . . . You see I know a bit about these things . . . though I was a horse-jockey at Newmarket twenty years, before you was born, I'll swear. Nom d'un chien, I've let the b——y cat out of the bag. I'm a b——y fool, if ever there was one. I wasn't going to tell you a word about it. . . . Come over 'ere, me dear." He spoke to a girl who had just come in. She was very slim, neatly dressed à l'Anglaise, and she carried an incongruous brown-paper parcel under her arm. "Viens donc, mon ange."

"C'est toi, vieux brute?"

He grinned expansively at her and she laughed. "Non, je ne bois pas . . . raté . . . suis sage."

He made a long, lethargic arm after her parcel. For a little while she amused herself in moving just out of his reach. Walter looked up at her in open adoration. "Montrez," Victor insisted. She gave it up to him. "Ce n'est pas de la lingerie, alors," he said, feeling it.



"Pas de chance, vieux salop."

He untied the parcel and examined the pair of new boots that it contained. "Très chic," he averred. He put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and slipped a louis into the toe of the shoe. Then he packed them up into their paper again. "J'ai gagné un peu," he explained. "Va te coucher."

"J'y vais, mon brave. . . ." She bent over and kissed him on the cheek. Then she went round the partition, waving her hand to him.

"There y'are, Wally. There's a lady for you. And she likes me a damned sight better than she does you. I'm fifty-six, and y're twenty-three. I'm ashamed of y'." The despair in his tone was sincere.

"Well, if y'flush y'cash about like that. . . ."

"Y're a fool. . . . 'Pon me word, you make me think sometimes that you ain't worth educating. Y'couldn't see that I gave her that because she liked me ! She didn't like me because I gave her a quid. You know that, I bet," he said to Maurice.

Maurice nodded.

"How old are you, if I might ask ? "

"Twenty-four."

"What's y'r weight ? "

"Nine stone six."

"Pity y'arn't a bit smaller. Y'd do well, you would. Y've got brains, I'll be bound. Instead of that pudden-head there." Walter smiled as at a familiar compliment.

"What d'y' do to get y'r money ? "

"I don't get any now. . . . I used to write a bit."

"Stories for the newspapers, and that sort of thing ? "

"Yes, that's the kind of thing."

"Not much in it ? "

"Nothing at all now."

"Well . . . I c'd put y'into the way of making a little bit. . . . Not much, but it'd keep y'going if y're in a 'ole. . . . I like someone to talk to, I do, specially if it's a toff. I

didn't get 'old of the right kind of English when I was at Newmarket. You come down to me. I got a lovely room, y'e'd 'ave, slap-up English. I'd feed you like a fighting cock. Y'can see I'm one as feeds himself decently. I'd give you a bit of pocket money . . . and the boys'd give y'any amount of tips if they knew you was with me. They like a gentleman, too. . . . Y'e'd make a tidy bit."

Maurice was about to explain, when Victor put his hand upon his shoulder.

"I don't mean now, straight off. But when y're really stumped. . . . You come along to me, and we'll do something. He's not a bad lad, when he's back among the horses. Victor, Portland Bar, Maisons Lafitte. You remember that. Any time. Don't y'worry to send me word."

Maurice was touched profoundly. It was all so incongruous and so real. "I've never met anyone who said a thing like that to me. I don't suppose I shall ever come, but . . ."

"Don't say that. . . . You just remember it. I've got y'r name. I won't forget. . . . It's a rum thing, meeting people, 'pon my sivvy, it is. Christ, it makes y'think, don't it? Talk about religion. . . . Y'ain't religious, are you? . . . Might 'ave trod on a corn, you see. 'Ave to be careful."

"He gets that way sometimes," Walter confided aloud, removing his rose.

"Wait till y're fifty-six, me buck. You'll want something to get on with. This won't do all the time." He swallowed a glass of champagne. ". . . even if y've got the money to pay for it."

"All right, ol' cock, we'll see about that. . . ."

Victor laughed. "By God, if y'weren't such a babe, Wally. . . . Y'd fair make me sick, sometimes."

"What time's y'r train?" he asked Maurice.

"Half-past seven. Gare d'Orléans."

"If you ain't doin' anything, what might you be going

there for ? . . . No, I'm asking questions. Like my cheek, ain't it ? ”

“ Not a bit.” Maurice wanted to tell him, but hesitated involuntarily.

“ It's a woman,” said Victor. Wally woke up to attention. “ That's what's done it. You're a bit soft that way, I reckon. . . . I was once. Don't let y'self in too quick. There's good 'uns and bad 'uns. That little 'un with the boots is a good 'un. But they're all funny things. . . . Quarter to five. . . . See's a bit of daylight got into this 'ole. You come and 'ave that room. Windows so's you can see for miles. D'ssay it's sun there by now. Shan't we have another bottle ? We got to go in twenty minutes ; get back and start the day like a couple of little birds. By God, we'll have a thumping fine breakfast when we do get back. Bacon and eggs, heaps of 'em. Real bacon, none of this damned *lard*. . . . That makes him wake up.”

“ No, you won't have another ? P'r'ps y're right. I've lived on it a'most, you see. *Portland Bar*. Pouring it out all day. But it's a natty little place. New and clean. A real English architec' come and done it ; and ev'ry one of the fittings come from the Tott'n'm Court Road. A regular fine saloon. And the boys ain't bad. They talk a bit. My own talk ain't a daisy. But they'd knock it into a cocked hat. But they're all right, really. You needn't be frightened of them.”

“ No, of course you wouldn't be. . . . Don't it give you a bit of a funny feeling, sittin' in a place like this and waiting for the daylight. God knows how many times I done it. . . . I can't get used to it somehow. I always got to shut at two sharp. I lose something over it too. But there y'are.”

“ Well, come up, Wally. 'S got some 'orses to look after at the station. . . . I do the talkin'.” Victor settled a generous bill while he spoke. “ Y'want anything to go on with ? I'm not stony. . . . *Au revoir, mon brave*,” he said to the garçon. “ Good-bye, don't forget that address. What about yours ? ”



"I haven't got one, just now."

"No, of course, you wouldn't have." He went out of the door. Wally shook hands, and then bent down.

"The old cock's a decent sort. He means it. He's not pullin' your leg."

So soon as they had gone the encounter was unreal to Maurice. His body, cheated of rest, trembled with chilly emptiness. To still it he called for a bowl of coffee and bread. When he had drunk and eaten, he began to doze in his corner. His anxiety about the time prevented him from sleep. The tune of the guitar reasserted in his head :

"Good-bye, my bluebell,  
Farewell to you . . ."

and the words seemed to him mournful like the steely-grey light that spread into the room. He heard men shouting viciously as they drove their heavy carts, laden high, over the cobbles. All things but these faded out of his mind. . . .

"Il est parti ?" His eyes were closed, and he was dozing still ; but he heard the words distinctly. It was the lady of the boots. He blinked at her.

"Yes," he said, "more than an hour ago."

"Pt-pt." She clucked with her lips. "I had an idea that he'd be gone." She showed Maurice a small bunch of splendid clove carnations, then thrust them under his nose. "They were for him. He loves flowers. Carnations more than anything. Oh, la . . . la . . . You're tired. . . . It's sad in the early morning, isn't it. . . . I give them to you. I'm off to bed. Good-bye."

It wasn't worth while to doze again. The clock showed half-past six. He went out. High-booted men were flushing the roadways of their litter of cabbage leaves. Sweepers pushed mountains of green refuse down the gutters before them. Here and there an old man or woman packed the last of his unsold goods into a cart. Besides, there was only the dense knot of men before the bar opposite.

"Il fera beau temps," said a woman tying up a sack to a man waiting to receive it on his cart. The light was still grey and cold.

Maurice went slowly through the empty markets. His legs dragged as at the laborious end of an interminable walk. But he was relieved that there were so few people about, for while he passed the few that remained his feelings were divided and painful. He was remote, a being from another earth, and yet he felt guiltily conscious that they knew all that he had done, all that he was doing. Inside the station hall, he was one of many who waited for trains. His presence there was unremarkable and he was sheltered.

He had yet an hour to wait. It was the longest hour of his life. It enfolded him immeasurably, and he was nothing but an apprehension that it would never end. He was the first to board the train when it slowly backed into the platform.

"Pas si vite, monsieur," said the man at the barrier. "Vous n'êtes pas le rapide, vous."

Maurice turned and smiled at the laughing man. Again he had been detected.

He was in a second-class carriage. Men and women, bearing bundles and pails, passed by his window, but none entered. Only a soldier climbed up and stood in the corridor beside him. It was to him a little shock when he recollected that plenty of soldiers in the French Army were well off, and more accustomed than he himself to travelling second-class. He seemed to have forgotten all he ever knew.

When the train began to move he was happy for a moment, for he had never quite believed it would really carry him away. He walked up and down the carriage. A sour taste was in his mouth from smoking so many cigarettes. He lit another. It burned away with furious speed.

The sun began to stream into his carriage. The soldier sang in the corridor. Maurice leaned his cheek against the

window and looked sideways on to the country. A nervous physical inquietude prevented him from fixing upon the landscape with his eyes. It melted past him ; and sometimes from the swiftly flowing stream a bridge or a house by the railside would emerge terribly close to him, and stupefy him as it roared away. White spots were the houses, green mists the fields. He could neither turn his eyes away from them nor hold them in his vision ; save only when the country parted on either side of a broad river, with dark and gentle water and dark trees, and the scene became a remembered picture, a romantic landscape that belonged to the past whence it had sprung to his mind.

Sometimes, but only for moments, he would see Madeleine before him, and he was engulfed in tenderness. But now there was a reluctance in him that would not suffer him to enjoy his own surrender. More and more of himself seemed to remain outside his emotion, and the instants when he saw her with a sudden clearness near to him and bound to him with an indissoluble bond became more and more momentary. Still into his mind there would flash a speech of her large eyes, a rough and childish movement of her hands to her throat, a tremulous movement of her lips, and a yearning to be with her again would pass through him like a gasp. He seemed to have leapt then over the distance between them, and the years and the miles fell away. But the moments would not stay with him. After them, motive and purpose left him. He was possessed by a fear. He was afraid to meet her again.

The train stopped at a wayside station. One person alone was on the whole length of the gravelled platform, a girl who ran along in the sun, selling cakes and fruit. On a mound of clay that showed over the platform fence three navvies were digging. They stopped to look at the train, but did not move at all. It was so quiet in the sunlight that Maurice heard himself breathing. He started from the silence, took hold of his bag and placed his hand upon



the handle of the door. Then he hesitated and the train moved. He threw himself back in the corner and smiled.

The train was a destiny bearing him on, and he acquiesced in it. Then he was consumed with bitterness against himself. "Weak—I'm weak," he muttered to himself. He sought to convince himself that he appreciated a joke that life had played upon him and he laughed. The end of his journey now bore continually into his mind, and always he was afraid of it. He did not know why he was afraid.

His actions would not stand steady before him that he might judge. They dissolved into one another and eluded him. Anne was distant as a star: he seemed to grope along a ray to find her, and then it was not Anne. The rest of his thoughts had mingled in chaos. He chimed incessantly that he had done wrong—wrong. The iteration drove him to feverish distraction, adding a last disorder to his chaos. If only there was a right in it all to hold by. Deliberately, he smashed his fist with all his strength against the wooden wall of his carriage. His body defied his will and at the last instant checked the blow. "You can't even do that," he said aloud. Nevertheless, his hand was hurt and he sat down and sucked at the pain with his lips.

Plucking nervously at the arm strap by the window he was bewildered by the crazy question: "What am I doing here?" Everything became incredible, the empty carriage, the streaming landscape, the smarting hand. Had he suddenly been inveigled out of life into this? The smooth and steady beat of the wheels upon the rails answered him. It brought him steadily nearer and nearer to something he feared. Again he asked himself petulantly what there was to fear. He could not reply, but he could not convince himself against his fear, for a suspicion worked in him that he was afraid to tell himself of what he was afraid.

"This is when men commit suicide, surely," he said. He had no weapon; but would he dare to kill himself? If any was the time for suicide it was this. No, he was

not afraid to. Suicide was not a matter of courage, but of belief. He would do it now, only he believed in life, no, not believed, desired life. He felt that something might come. Why did other men kill themselves then? They did it now, why? Because they did not desire life, did not believe that something would come. No, that was impossible. He saw the door, and knew that he had only to throw himself out, only to let himself fall. "I'm a coward," he said.

What was he afraid of? Again and again the question tormented him. It was the only respite he had from being afraid. All the dreams of triumphant and final return had dissipated into the cold mist. The flooding warmth of tenderness and self-pity ebbed utterly away. Even now he would stop and go back. The thought had no positive meaning. When he had stopped, when he had gone back, what then? What had he to do with anything after this? And this must end, must end. But how could an end come? It would not come by his action. It would come, he supposed, when he could not any more. . . . A vicious flash of determination kindled him. He would find the end in Madeleine. He would love her as she loved him. On that he would lift himself and conquer life. Of course—it was so plain. Here he had been deluding himself into agonies, and the answer had been before him. Again he saw her in a small clear picture of that old life of theirs. They had been sleeping together. On the chair by their bed had lain a sketch-book and a pencil that he had taken out of his pockets, when he got up to fumble for matches. She had asked what the book was for. "C'est pour dessiner," he said, just as he lit the little lamp.

"Alors, dessine moi." Suddenly with the word she had flung away all the bedclothes, and had lain there naked watching him. That was how he had begun before, he thought, as the warmth of his recollection clouded about him; and now he had lost what he had but a moment found. He was afraid again. He sought to put down his

fear by holding fast to his determination. They would live together, happily, and life would begin. He would compel himself to the pattern of life, and thus he would find himself again. He would find nothing, nothing. His love for Madeleine had been the beginning of himself. He could not go back and be the thing he had been. Neither recollection nor imagination of that he had been came to him ; only a written record of indecipherable events.

His mind travelled the same weary circle many times. Fear was followed by a tender calm, and the calm awoke the fear again. The effort to hold fast to his determination, to find the end in Madeleine, occupied all his will ; but his will was weak now, and soon spent. " Why not ? " he said to himself once more as the train entered the station at Lesdigues.

It was a full half-mile to the town. He could see the distance plainly, for the houses were bunched upon a brown and yellow hill-side. He asked the station-master if there was a rue Gambetta in the town, and when the answer came that it led straight on to the *place* he was glad that he had asked, as though he had narrowly avoided an ambush.

" Il y a de la musique tous les dimanches—à la place," said the station-master.

It was past noon and far hotter than it had been in Paris. The road was white and dusty. On one side the ground sloped steeply up to the hill, and the small enclosures were covered with a framework of poles, climbed by slender green plants. On the other was marsh and pasture down to the railway and beyond. Maurice looked curiously up the hill as he walked ; then he realised with a certain surprise that they were vineyards, and it seemed to him then that this was a wonderful place to have lived in. He leaned against a rough wall by the road-side, reluctant to go further. It was hot, and he was apprehensive. The general quiet was broken only by the dwindling echo of a far-departing train and the sound of voices drawing near. He looked rigidly at the vineyards above him, for he dared



not look at the road. Two women passed behind him without pausing. He knew they were women's voices, but their speech was so strange that he could not make out their words. When they were well past, he looked after them. One was dressed in the commonplace and frightening black of the towns, the other in a peasant costume, wide-skirted and white-bonneted. Neither was Madeleine. He felt that it was beyond his power to go nearer to the town.

He made an effort of will to follow out the beginning of his determination, and walked on. The first house, whose garden straggled out and was lost on the hill-side, smote him with fear, like the gate of a prison. Turning on his heel he paused. Some people were coming up the hill behind him. Surely they were watching him now. He bent his head and went blindly forward. Once he lifted his eyes to look in front of him along the road, and saw a few small trees, like rows of black-headed pins, at the end of the vista. In his glance he caught sight of two women who sat sewing in their doorways, quite close to him, for the road was narrow between houses now. Timidly his eyes rested upon them. One, grey-haired, looked up at him indifferently, then down the hill and spoke to her companion. Maurice lowered his eyes and quickly hurried on.

At the corner of the *place* he peered about, wondering which of the roads that led on to it from over the edge and up the slope of the hill which it crowned, might be the rue Gambetta. To ask anyone was impossible. The town was so still and small that every whisper would have reverberated to its confines. He turned to look back the way he had come. He could see in the clear distance the railway station and the silver line. How far away it was and infinitesimal! It was strange that he should have been able to come along that vanishing thread. . . . It would not do to stand like this. Everybody would be staring at him. Abruptly he faced about, and for an instant on the way his eyes rested upon the enamel label of the street. "Rue Gambetta," it spelt.

He was overwhelmed, distraught and sick ; and then his spirit soared in the knowledge that he had been delivered. He had been lifted out of the very jaws. . . . Everybody must be watching him now. He headed quickly across the square. A *débit de boissons* loomed before him and he entered. It was cool and dark. The latch clicked and an epoch closed behind him. Sitting down at a wooden table he watched in the silence the dust marks on the narrow slit of clear glass above the window. The rest was covered with dark paper. Somewhere a clock ticked incredible seconds lazily to the sun. From away behind the house cries languidly reached him. A man came in with soft, shuffling steps.

“Monsieur désire . . . ? ”

“Du vin—blanc.”

Maurice leant back against the wall, and watched the man bend down behind the counter with a bottle. The wine ran cool to his ears. The man served him and stood by, contemplating him.

“One begins to be thirsty now,” said Maurice.

“It’s the summer beginning. . . . Does monsieur come from far ? ”

“From Paris.”

“It’s a long journey. Very tiring. If monsieur wishes for a room . . . ”

“I’m going back to-night. . . . You have a timetable ? ”

The landlord shook his head. “There are only three trains each way every day. One can remember them. There is one back to Paris at five o’clock. . . . Monsieur is in business ? ”

Maurice shook his head. “Travelling simply.” The need of the excuse was imperious. “I ought to have got out at Poitiers, but I was asleep. I was up all last night, so as not to miss the train ! ”

“Oh, la belle histoire ! ” the man laughed. “That will have cost you three good pieces.”

"It's my luck," said Maurice. "One has to pay for stupidities."

The landlord nodded his head.

"Is there no other road to the station but the one I came up . . . ? I should like to go a different way, to see everything."

"I don't know one myself," said the landlord.

Maurice was safe in the dark, cool room. Desperately he longed to be alone. While he talked to the landlord, he could think of nothing save the words he was saying. He could not even approach himself to understand and be honest. More than all else he desired to be honest ; but now all his thoughts and feelings seemed to have departed from him. While he spoke with the landlord he felt that his very soul belonged elsewhere than to him. The man would go if he said nothing ; and yet an urgent question trembled on his lips. He shrank from asking it ; but the desire tormented him. He wanted to say it, no more. The answer mattered nothing.

The landlord turned slightly away, bending to wipe a table that was not stained. Maurice said : "Do you by any chance know some people called De la Pène here ?"

The landlord made no reply. He went on with his tidying. Maurice had spoken so low that he had not heard. He began to shuffle away.

"If monsieur wants anything more," he said at the door, "he has only to knock hard."

Maurice could not ask again, though he tried. His mind and body were one dull torment of pain. The emptiness of unfulfilled desire encompassed him. Yet the relief of his escape and his present security was with him also. His desires were unfulfilled ; but what did he desire ? All things and none—to be near Madeleine and to escape from her, to be with Anne and not to return to her, to die and to live on. The impulse to each awoke in him only its instant denial. They followed hard on one another, pressing down and obscuring that which had gone before. "Choose,



choose now." Something at his elbow seemed to urge him to instant choice, fevering him.

Voices and the sound of loitering footsteps came to him. They paused outside close by. He shuddered with a terror lest they should enter. The darkened window and the stout door were but a flimsy curtain between his refuge and them.

"Elle est triste, vous savez." It was a woman's voice, and she laughed. A man responded. Maurice did not hear what he said; but he heard everyone laugh. At a snail's pace they passed by the door, and every step was leaden upon his heart.

"No, no, no," he muttered, and he did not know what he was denying. Everything blent into one unbearable. "If only . . ." he said. "No . . . no, God, I wasn't made for this. . . . Something stronger. . . ." He stopped himself with a kind of bodily violence.

"I must get away," he said. He rose and dropped back into his seat again. His head leaned heavily upon his hands, and his eyes were fixed upon two flies that crawled upon the windows. They were not moving. The space between them did not change. He wanted to get up and see if they were really flies. Rising again, he was driven to agony by the scraping of his chair. He waited, listening if the landlord would come, until his lungs would burst for need of breath.

"You'll crack up, like this," he said. Incomprehensibly, he thought of his mother. He was very tired, and he was leaning his head against her shoulder. She patted it gently and said, "It's all right, dear. It's all right." Immediately the dream became terrible and grotesque, actual and charged with horrors. His lips moved rapidly, saying over lines of poetry. Verses repeated themselves over and over again :—

"There's nothing to tell : my heart is dead . . .  
. . . Have not many watched their soul  
Wither and die ? It is not well  
That sick hearts should torment the whole."

He began a long speech of King Arthur's learned at school.

"Thus spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
This sequel of to-day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship . . ."

"This sequel of to-day," he repeated. He felt that it had something to do with him; but he could find no meaning in the words. "This sequel of to-day. . . ." It was urgent to be understood; but he had lost the key. It was only a sound.

"I must get away," he said, as though he were seriously remonstrating with somebody. He had to go down that street. "O Lord," he said gravely, "let this cup pass from me." When he had muttered the words to himself he was cold with horror at their blasphemy. He had offended one of the unknown powers that held him fast. For the first time came to him the idea of a power which worked upon him; then too late, when he had sinned the sin against it. This desperate conviction of ultimate offence stiffened him. He stood up, and the noise of his scraping chair was good. It was something done. "Die in the open," he said, smiling, waiting by the counter. The man appeared in the passage. Maurice held up a franc in his fingers and laid it on the counter. Then he went over to his table and took a long drink of his wine.

"Bon jour, monsieur." He returned the landlord's greeting and went out, closing the door slowly behind him. He had to go down the rue Gambetta. The landlord must be watching him from the door, for he had not waited for his change. He had to go down the rue Gambetta. He walked slowly round the side of the square. He had sinned against the power. "It's all up," he said. He was overcome by a sense of destiny.

So he walked down the rue Gambetta, saying to himself words about Destiny, looking steadily at the houses on either side and the people who passed him. None of them did he recognise. He felt that he would not even start if a hand were put upon his shoulder, or a voice should call to

him "Maurice." His pace grew slower and slower, in response to an instinct that he must give Destiny plenty of time. "They wouldn't know me," he said to himself with sudden surprise ; and he knew that in the last hours he had changed. He was hardly moving at all now ; but all curious to know what he really looked like. Instinctively he put his hand to his face. It was cold. His eyes fixed upon a doorway flanked by two empty chairs, and then he knew beyond all doubt that Madeleine had been sitting there when he came up the street, that she was the woman who had not looked at him. Very slowly moving down the hill, he came level with the door. His eyes were immovably set upon the chairs. Madeleine had seen him when he came up the street. Madeleine was dead. The logic of his strange knowledge could not be questioned. How funny were empty chairs ! He had never known before that they could look so stupid, so utterly empty. He had passed them now, but he glanced back to see them again. The sun shone on the polished seat of one of them and it glinted. He loitered along down the hill, waiting for Destiny. Bitterness and irony were together in his mind as he passed below the straggling garden of the last house. Destiny had missed its chance.

So he came again to the station. A train would not be long, said the surprised official. Maurice sat in the most conspicuous seat by the door, and nearly fell asleep. People were talking, but their speech was drowsy, like the humming of insects in the sun. A woman with a basket nudged him. Would he like some cakes ? Her basket was full of them. Then he knew that he was hungry, and the woman with wide, amazed eyes, gave him the worth of fifty centimes.

"It's not every day that one sells like that." She dragged a bag from a deep pocket under her apron and put the silver piece into it. Maurice blinked at her kindly, wrinkled eyes, and smiled. "Monsieur is hungry, evidently."



"Yes. I've been a long way."

"Ah!" She picked up her basket, trilling a youthful "Bon jour."

He was almost too sleepy to munch one of his many cakes. He pulled himself together for the duty, sitting forward. A group of two women and three men were talking together and looking at him. Plainly they were talking about him. The station-master was putting in a word. His white Imperial wagged vehemently.

"Le voici," called out someone on the platform; and the group moved one pace together towards the inner door.

The station-master stood over Maurice. He wondered what he was looking at him so close for. The Imperial was wagging, and there was a puzzled twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Monsieur has no ticket, I believe."

"No more have I," said Maurice in English, then in French. "I forgot all about it. I didn't know I was going back to-day."

The station-master had scurried into the office. The group was looking at him and nodding, "What did I tell you?" to each other. He could hear the train now. It came into the platform just as the station-master returned with the ticket, smiling.

"You are fatigued, monsieur?"

"Yes, a little. Good day." Maurice went on to the platform to board the train. As he shut the door, the station-master dashed up again.

"And monsieur's valise?" he called out, as though it were the culminating joke. He hauled it up into the carriage and settled it in the rack over the head of a fat man, who watched placidly but did not cease to talk to his companion.

Maurice put his hand into his pocket. The station-master laid a friendly hand upon his arm, shaking his head.

"There's no reason. Bon voyage."

"Merci. . . ." He leant out of the window. "I haven't heard the music in the *place* after all," he called.

"Next time," shouted the station-master. The train was moving away. Maurice looked back to wave farewell to him. He was standing beside the cake woman. They both waved in reply.

Maurice sat eating his cakes in the corner of the carriage. The voluble conversation of the fat man rolled about his ears. He was lulled to sleep before he could finish a mouthful. Once or twice he roused himself sufficiently to swallow, but the effort was soon spent.

The fat man, whose red face was like a generously rounded triangle, its apex in his stubbled sandy hair, bent forward as far as he could. The movement was hardly perceptible. But he seemed to enjoy his own disabilities. His two hands rested appreciatively upon his fleshy thighs. He indicated Maurice with a movement of his eyes and a simultaneous swing of his little finger.

"Epuisé," he said.

The man opposite, comparatively thin, mainly black and very smart, lifted his eyebrows in surprise, and regarded Maurice.

"C'est vrai. Pauvre diable."

"Peut même pas manger," said his companion.

## CHAPTER X

ANNE hesitated, entering the hotel. Her final conversation with Miss Etheredge, while they walked slowly under the dark arches of the Odeon, had been of a piece with the rest of her day, heavy with the weight of incalculability. Words and actions had risen, suddenly, into brief, consuming instants, that were and were gone. They stretched her spirit and left it aching with the strain. Yet she had known it all. She had been prepared. But these instants had been beyond all preparation. Like lightning out of storm clouds they had leaped apart from the matter whence they were born. Pressure broke into flame. She had been steeled against the pressure ; but the flame struck through her defence as though it had not been.

Anne knew that the last flame had not yet been sped against her. She waited in the shadow by the hotel steps, entranced by vain and sick imaginations. She would not enter, but go, now, far away. Facing life was only a romantic lie. Life was, whether she faced it or not, and she would live without the help of empty heroism. Let her be taken away and set in some remote paradise, where wise old women would touch her gently and speak softly to her. "My daughter," they would say, looking at her as she lay feeble and sick and world-broken. The sun would be heavy with afternoon. She would lie there and sleep and wonder that she was ever strong, that she had ever been awakened. "My daughter," they would say, and they would smooth the cool pillows for her because she had been burnt with a bitter fever out in the distant world that was only a memory of evil and pain.

She swayed a little, and leant heavily against the wall.



The dream and the temptation were sad like remembered music, sounding about her while she ascended the steps. She was heavy with foreknowledge. Its weight, not any will of her own, held her still in the vestibule. The little light from the bureau made a circle on the ground. She stood just beyond it. In front of her the dim stairs climbed to another light and then were dim again. She stood outside the circle of light like a player in the darkness of the wings. She was not ready to step forward on to the stage. She was tired beforehand of the part she had been cast to play. She could not say her opening lines. And so she waited for the reply.

It came with a rustling and a jangling of the key upon the counter-plate.

"Madame Temple ?" said a voice, politely tired.

"Oui. C'est moi."

"Monsieur est sorti . . . à minuit." Anne waited still. ". . . Avec une valise."

Mechanically, Anne felt it was her cue. Slowly it set her movement free. The play had begun. She was climbing the stairs on to the stage.

The light which she turned on into the room seemed itself to create a sudden cold desolation. She sat down in the chair before the dressing table, and gently lifted each box and tray from the table and set it back again. She did not find any message. She held the last a long while in her hands. It was the little round black box with the broken silver label *Studs*. She opened it and moved the studs and buttons with her finger. Shutting it again she contemplated it as though it had been a strange shell picked up from the sands.

She stood up from her chair and undressed herself quietly, recognising the new clothes which Maurice had so carefully left behind him ; and with the recognition came a separate stab. Then she took up the little box again, biting her lip in agony, and sank into the chair again. "Oh, Morry . . . my lover," she said. She saw in the mirror

before her the tightened flesh of her lip and the tears that rushed impetuously down her cheeks. For an instant the very sight of her own abandonment loosened the iron bonds that gripped her body ; but, the instant past, she knew that what she would see would frighten her. She lay down on the bed with her face in the pillow, which she clasped about her head.

Every tautened spring in her was loosed in utter weakness. Without sleep she dreamed, the vision that she had seen while she waited outside the hotel. She was on the borderland between life and death. Old women were smoothing the pillows for her hot cheeks. Their fingers passed lightly over her forehead and over her hair : " My daughter," they said.

Anne slept on till the spring sun warmed her face, and she slowly wakened at the touch. She remembered all that had passed before her sleep, and she looked, so soon as her eyes were strong to see in the bright sunlight, for the black box upon the table. Inwardly she was calm ; but the pale face she saw in the mirror made her smile. The smile brought back some blood into her cheeks and sent little waves of tired contentment through her whole being. The miracle of mere existence awoke in her body a response which her mind neither controlled nor desired. While she moved about the room in slow preparations, often forgotten as soon as begun, she was for a time no more than her gently acting body. Behind it, in a vague and separate distance, trailed recollections, sharp in outline, thin in substance, of a play in which she had borne a part. But not that face which steadily smiled at her when her eyes met it in the glass, which smiled as though the condition of its life were to smile, had played a part in the past. Something had been lost in the perilous passage. The principle which united soul and body, her recollections and that foreign face, had been worn or burnt away in the darkness. A life that had been despaired had been saved ; but there

was a chasm between the past and the present. In the crossing her life had been enfeebled.

She took up the black box once more from the table, and moved the buttons about with her finger.

"What funny studs!" she said. She took out a long one with a swivel-top, and it stood like a tiny monument alone on the dressing-table. "It's just like Morry . . . Morry. . . ." She mouthed the name as though it were half-foreign to her, a word that had suddenly lost its meaning; and she seemed to be waiting, puzzled, until it should be informed by a sense once more. The stud was somehow more really Maurice than he.

"I must keep the stud to remind me."

It was then that she began to hate the room in which she was. She wished to be away from it, away from the city. She was not desperate or impatient, but from a point in her mind the clear and invincible conviction slowly radiated that to be herself again she must leave Paris. Paris held the chasm between her present and her past; it was the chasm. If she remained here her mind would never cease to grope backwards for the thing it could not reach. Away, she could hold the past close to her again, and so forget it. Now it was outside her, and she was obsessed by it.

She began to gather her things together. The activity of ordering them beautifully in her boxes was a deep pleasure, the beginning of deliberate calm. Her mind had chosen and her body was the willing servant of her mind. Harmony, brutally broken, began to be again. She thought idly, while the sun played bewilderingly upon the silver of her dressing-case, where she would go. She was gracious to her wounded mind when she found that it was searching for a place like the haven of her dream. The peace, the gentle warmth of that persuasive sunlight, allured her. "I should make one of those old women, now," she said, remembering their ministry. "That must be in the South." No use to look for opulent summer north of a



Paris spring. She would go to Avignon. Once—it was their honeymoon—she had been over the palace with Jim. He was a dim, dissolving outline now.

She felt herself ready to take all experiences deep into her. Now she was transparent and open, ready to receive. There was no barrier of her own personality to be broken down any more. The slightest wave would ripple gently to her heart. This it was to be free ; freedom was this calm and harmony which she felt was being so sweetly born in her. So sure of it was she that she asked herself whether she was not strong enough now to stay in Paris and thus put her new freedom to the test. She was disappointed at the question as a little girl is disappointed to whom a promised holiday is suddenly denied ; and she was filled with a naive wonder when she remembered that she was the mistress even of her minor destinies. She would go to Avignon.

Her boxes were packed. She went into the sitting-room to summon a servant for her bill, and to look at the time-table. The time-table lay in the side of the armchair in which Maurice had sat. Even in the smallest things the conclusion had so delicately fitted. A dozen hours, and she was doing the same things that he had done, sitting in the same chair, the same time-table on her knees.

The door was softly opened. Anne looked up without surprise to see Dennis. She had almost forgotten his strange absence. It was not important. Though she was wondering whether he had changed, she seemed to have no memories of him with which she could compare what she saw now.

“Hullo, Anne,” he said, oddly smiling. “I’ve spent the last three hours sitting on my bag in the other room, trying to decide whether I would wait to see you or not. . . . I don’t know whether I decided that I would wait.” He spoke as one sick with weariness of his own debate. “I suppose I forgot what I was thinking about.”

“Maurice has gone away,” she said, “he went away last night.”

"He's left you?" Dennis might have been indifferent, or have failed to understand.

"Yes."

"I suppose I ought to be surprised. . . . I suppose I am surprised. . . . But I'm left behind now." He laughed. "I made my grab at life, and just touched it with my fingertips. So now I can't see the importance of anything. Perhaps nothing is important. So Morry's gone. . . . Tell me, what do you feel about it? . . . No, I mustn't ask that. . . . You know I can't think that other people aren't in the same condition. . . . What a wonderful sun!"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't ask. Only I couldn't tell you. I felt so very many things. . . . What are you going to do now?"

"I was thinking about that, too. I don't know. . . . After all, it's hardly likely that I should. . . . I asked Miss Etheredge to marry me yesterday."

"I knew that."

"She told you?"

"No, I don't think so. I hardly remember; but I gathered it from her."

"Were you surprised?" Without waiting for the answer Dennis looked hard at her. "You've changed a lot, haven't you?"

"Was I surprised? . . ." She seemed to be thinking back with an effort. "No. That wasn't it. I was more frightened, I think. Perhaps it was Miss Etheredge. Yes, I was terrified."

"I know what you mean. It came to me too. On my box there, I was wondering whether it had been a nightmare. Not what happened. There's no doubt about that." He laughed. "But the way I saw it. I thought that I might have been sick, disordered—in my soul. Either that, or I saw something plainly for once. Perhaps it was life. I never know what that means, except that it is always something quite different from what other people mean. . . . I don't think it was sickness, really."

"So Morry's gone. He'll never come back. He'll try to. But now he'll be strong enough, just strong enough, not to. He'll not be worth having if he comes, and—somehow—he is worth having. One of these days when he loses his pride, he'll know what it was that he nearly held, so very nearly. He won't be sad—because he will have no pride. Either that, or he will never see. . . .

"But I believe in Morry in the end."

"I believe in him," said Anne.

"Why I talk about pride," said Dennis slowly, "is that I am losing mine. I discovered that on the box, too. Pride . . ." he nodded, recognising the truth in his own mind. The recognition seemed to change his very tone. "May I tell you what happened to me after you went away that night? I think I'd like to. It'd help me. I can go away clear then."

"I should like to hear."

Dennis glanced at her. "I'll make it short," he said. "If I tried to tell all—why, then there might be pride again. Only what matters.

"When I think back, there was one great reason why I came over here. There may have been others. There certainly were; but one was important. I wanted to do something. The work, the position, the money, the kudos—it wasn't very much. I can see now that it was very little. Two days ago, I thought it was nothing at all. But before I came, even if it wasn't much, it had hold of me. I hated it with one part, and delighted in it with another. And then—perhaps it was seeing you two together—I felt that I was at the end of my tether. I had to do something, immediately. It was to be a kind of symbol of my own will to good. Chuck up my job—came into my mind instantly. No . . . it had been there all the while; but only then—the day I left you at the station—it begun to obsess me. It seems incredible now that I hesitated and tortured myself almost mad up there in Sheffield. It took me a fortnight, anyway. You can see by that that it was something.



“Then I did it. Last Sunday it was—last Sunday. Good Lord! when I was going to the station I was happy enough. That was a gain. I can’t remember that I’ve ever been happy even for half an hour before. But when I got into the train my mind began to work, slowly at first. I thought that it was my own particular devil worrying me for a bit. But it didn’t take long to convince me. Chucking up my job seemed only to be a thing that I ought to have done years ago. It hadn’t any meaning any more. I’d done it; and I might just as well have stayed up there in Sheffield . . . telling them about the optic nerve. I was wretched on the journey, wretched. I convinced myself that it didn’t matter what I did, I should always be the same; and now I’d nothing even to occupy my hands. The whole place was foreign. It laughed at me. I had something to eat at the Gare du Nord, I remember, and I tried to decide whether I would just go back. Every time I thought that—it got as far as taking a ticket—I felt somewhere that I wasfunking.

“And so I came along. When I saw you here, for a few moments I had an idea that I had really done something worth while after all. I don’t quite know what you had to do with that feeling; something anyway. That was when I showed you the letter, wasn’t it? I was proud of it at the moment. And then I could see that you thought it was just ordinary, what you might have expected. I knew that was the truth. And it hurt me terribly while we went along to that tea-party, terribly. When I got there I felt that I couldn’t say a word to anybody; because they would see immediately what kind of a man I was. I couldn’t believe it, when they didn’t see. I think I expected them, the moment they saw my face, to rise up and turn me out. They didn’t see anything unusual, only Miss Etheredge. She knew. And there was something in the way she knew it that made me feel that I could have killed her. (You don’t know how chock full of murder I’ve been these days.) She seemed to take my soul in between her

fingers and just throttle it, like that. . . . And when I saw that, I turned bitter with anger against her. Then I changed . . . curiously. I felt that I had an enormous power, that I could be cruel beyond imagination. I felt that I was being cruel and I was glad. Do you understand that? All that I saw in Miss Etheredge, I was, only ten thousand times more. This fellow Wauchope came in, and when I saw him, I felt that he was just like me—not in everything—but in the thing that Etheredge stirred up in him. Only there was a difference. He had been beaten by her. Netta was only something to help him forget. I wasn't going to be beaten by her. I was all power; and the power was to humiliate and crush her.

"I was frightened of myself. I was two things—this power and desire to be cruel, and an ebb of sentimentality. I pitied the whole world, myself the first. I was in a kind of agony of regret, all at the same time. But when I got outside, everything seemed to leave me. I felt as though I had been living under terrible pressure for years and years, and had at last been pressed too hard and failed. . . ."

Dennis got up and began to walk up and down the room. His hands were in his pockets, and his head bent.

"That didn't last very long. The memories of what I had felt came back like a nightmare, but much more real than any nightmare. It had been a kind of revelation. I argued to myself about it on the way to Montmartre, and I proved that the thing which was myself, the thing that I had been trying to find, by doing things, was a monstrous evil—infinite, deliberate cruelty, not for the sake of any pleasure in cruelty, but because that was the only way of action for me. I thought of all kinds of monstrous things, quite deliberately. When I was dancing with that girl—Josephine—no, it's not worth telling. But all the while I was horrified at this cruelty that seemed to have taken shape inside me. I was just dumb with the horror, fascinated. Sometimes this, sometimes the cruelty went all through my mind. Sometimes they both disappeared, and

again I wanted to do something, that would cost me a struggle. I think it was because I thought that I should learn something about myself—and then it was a symbol of my own good will.

“That was why I took that girl.” Dennis laughed, despairing and indifferent. “At least that was the first why. All kinds of other things crowded into my mind afterwards. It seemed to me cruel that I should take the girl, neither loving nor desiring her, but just paying. Besides, I could see that she was frightened of me, and anxious that I should be *gentil*—you remember. I wanted to do all those cruelties. I hated them and I was frightened too. I was obsessed by the certainty that this would change me, and I was terrified of a me that I did not know. It was like waiting for death—with half a hope of a life to come. I was in an agony at the idea of this incalculable future; and at the same time I couldn’t get rid of the thought that if I couldn’t find the will and the courage to do it, then it was all over with me. Then, again, I thought that it would hurt you. (Did it, I wonder?) That, too, made it harder to do it, and made it more worth while. I was set on doing all the hurt I could, deliberately. Again, there were moments when the girl seemed to me so simple that I wanted to be kind to her, and thought that she would be happy when she found that I was different from the other men she had. I know that these things sound ridiculous together. They contradict each other. But I felt them, and they did not contradict each other then. . . .

“When you went away I was better. I had stuck out the first trial. I wanted to go away with you both, desperately. It seemed to me that I should never see you again. Something was going to happen, to you, as well as to me. If I was not there. . . . Oh, there’s no point in going into that. It doesn’t really belong to this story. . . .

“The girl took me home. She said it was better to walk; that the air was so fresh after the restaurant. It may have been true, it probably was. But I thought she was trying



to put off the moment when I should be in her room alone with her. And then she kept on asking me: 'You'll be kind to me? I'm very small, quite a child'—she actually said that. She said she had one of her own, and I must see him. His hands were smaller than hers. I remember she said all that. She kept looking up at me, (She was hanging on to me, so light, that I had an idea that I was carrying some kind of silk wrap on my arm.) I saw she was frightened of me; and when I saw that I wanted to be more and more cruel to her, so cruel—I saw this actually at the time—that she should not cry at all, but just stare at me—stare. . . . That was very clear in my brain, clearer than any diagram. It looked as though it had been drawn—ruled—in front of me. There was no need to hurry. It was impossible for either of us to escape—for part of me wanted to escape as much as she. . . .

"Well, we got to the room. It was quite small, at the top of a long stairs. There was a bed and a chair and a table with a mirror, and a wallpaper with bright green crosses on it, a pattern of green crosses. I sat in the chair, and looked at her. But my eyes seemed not to be working. I hardly saw her. She had her back turned to me and slipped off her clothes on to the floor. Suddenly she turned round to me. I thought for a second she had done it on purpose, to make me passionate. She was bent forward, with her hands between her knees, looking at me, more frightened than before. Then I knew she had done it on purpose because she thought she could soften me, that I would see how small and slight she was. So she was. I think she was very beautiful in her way—very complete, perfect. . . . That's not the word, but it doesn't matter. I sat in the chair and watched her get into bed. She made a place for me, banged the pillows. Yes, she was very pretty. She told me to come.

"I was thinking of other things. She was more frightened because I did not come. Then I asked her if men had been brutal to her.

“ ‘Never,’ she said, and then : ‘There was one once. . . .’

“ ‘What did he do to you ?’

“ She did not answer, and I asked her again.

“ Then she said ‘no,’ and went on saying ‘no.’

“ I seemed to forget that I had asked her. I said to myself over and over again, ‘No, she wouldn’t answer,’ while my thoughts became harder and harder, more brutal. They were hardly even thoughts any more. My mind had nothing to do with them—that’s what I mean. They simply were there, like a lot of lines. I seemed to follow them out, infinitely, along lines, one after the other. . . . (I told you about the wallpaper, didn’t I ? Bright green crosses—a pattern of them. . . .) All these crosses seemed to have faded away, all except one. That stuck out. It was very bright, shining. Well, all these thoughts—they weren’t thoughts. I can’t explain. You understand ?—ended in that cross. I suppose it was rather like a flower with petals. I say that now. Every petal was one of these thoughts. When it got to the centre of the cross I was satisfied. Some of them didn’t—and then I must have gone nearly mad. But even when I was satisfied, I knew it was evil, cruel, terribly cruel. . . .

“ I must have forgotten myself, while that went on. I could see the girl in my mind. She was very clear, mixed up with all those lines ; but I forgot that she was really there, in the same room, in bed. Then I heard her saying something, just a kind of noise drumming in my ears. I knew it meant something, and I wanted to find out. I knew I had only got to do something to hear her . . . you know . . . what do they call it ? . . . focus your attention. But I knew it was terribly important what she said. Everything depended on it. Absolutely everything. I could hardly force myself to listen. I felt too weak to know. Of course, that can only have taken a second or two.

“ I heard her say, ‘You’re too tired.’

“ I was saved. Then she said : ‘Come and sleep. We’ll be good.’

"I only wanted someone to hold me up and take me into the air. That's what I felt; but I was standing up as strong as anything. I forgot what I said to her—probably that I wasn't feeling well. I forget. I know she sat up in bed and I kissed her. She said: 'You're coming back. . . . I love you . . . *grand bête*.' I remember the funny way she looked up at me when she said '*grand bête*.' I gave her that fifty francs from you, put it in the hand with the ring and shut it up. . . .

"I wonder if I'm being too tragic about all this. . . . It sounds like it, doesn't it? Perhaps—but I can't tell it any other way.

"Aren't the nights getting short now? Have you noticed? It was just on the point of dawn when I got out of that house. I could see the steps down the stairs. I dare say I was there longer than I thought.

"It wasn't far from the river. I don't know quite where, but not far from a kind of market-place full of barrels, barrels each side of the roadway. I told you how weak I felt. There were a few people about, mostly people who had to stay out all night, poor ones, beggars. I gave them all something, until I hadn't any more. It wasn't charity or kindness, not at all. I wanted to buy something from them, just wanted them to say 'God bless you,' or anything like that. And every time they did—almost every one of them did—I knew it wasn't any good, just like when somebody says, 'Don't think about that,' when you can't help thinking about it, and it makes you think about it all the more. Not that I was thinking, at any rate, not what I call thinking.

"I only felt hungry for something hard and definite, that I could take hold of. I nearly achieved it, with Josephine . . . but I was stopped, saved. Yes, I knew (felt, I mean) that I had been saved. That it would have been better if I hadn't been. I was only a wreck, left behind. I wanted something to crystallise round, and it had to be my own. I walked miles and miles like that. I'm just begin-



ning to feel tired in the legs after all that walking. I had some more of it. Sometimes I saw queer little pictures. You were in most of them. Especially us two on the top of that hill, you remember? Not so very long ago, is it? No, I wasn't thinking. I wanted to get into the country; but there didn't seem to be any. Outside Paris, the way I went, was just like the inside.

"It's not worth while telling all this, really. . . . Well, it was pretty late when I had something to eat. I couldn't have been very changed, really—I kept enough money for food, enough to bring me back." He felt in his pocket and showed a few coppers in his hand and laughed. "Rather nicely calculated, I should say. I ate meat and things somewhere near the fortifications. The wine, ordinary cheap wine, made me warm and cloudy, rather as though I had been asleep and just waked up. I began to remember about what had happened since I came to Paris. It was all hazy and not intolerable. Then Etheredge came into my mind. She never went out of it again.

"She suddenly solved everything. I was going to marry her. It was very nearly one o'clock when I knew that. I had to do it all before you came to see her; for I remembered perfectly that you were going. It took me some time to get there, because I didn't know exactly where I was; but much less time than I had expected. All the way I was surer and surer that to marry her was the one way for me. I can't say why I wanted to marry her; but it was plain to me that this was the thing I was seeking, that would save me. I don't think she came into my mind except as that. I'm certain I didn't have the ideas about her that I had at Ramsay's the day before. They may have been there, of course, but they didn't count for anything then. It was a revelation if there ever was one; I never had any doubt about it, and after a little while I was convinced that she was as certain as I was. Only I was desperately anxious that I should get to her before you did. After you had been, it would be too late. (It wasn't

you who would have interfered. I didn't think so, anyhow. But it had to be done immediately.) I got to her street, as it happened, in plenty of time. . . .

"She opened the door herself, and looked at me for a second, and said: 'You've come to see the pictures.' Then she went away and left me to shut the door. As soon as I saw her, I began to doubt. The way she said 'You've come to see the pictures,' and being left alone to shut the door—it all helped. It began to be inconceivable. Somewhere the whole world was laughing at me in my face. A foundation had been knocked away from under my feet. As I went after her into the other room, I clung to the words I was going to say, as if they were the only thing that remained. Nothing could have stopped me from saying them then.

"She was kneeling on the floor by the fire. As I came into the doorway she struck a match and set some paper in the fireplace on fire.

"'You've just come in time,' she said, '. . . I'm burning the gallery.' She didn't look at me.

"I was hanging on to my words, and I said them.

"'I want you to marry me.'

"The moment I had said them it was all over. There was nothing more to hold on to at all. She didn't even look round, but stared at the fire in the fireplace. It began to blaze and crackle.

"Then she said: 'I knew you'd do that. . . . But you've been very quick about it.'

"I don't know how long it was that we said nothing—a very long time. No, it can't have been very long. The fire hadn't stopped blazing. She turned round to me and said:

"'Smash up that canvas there. It's too strong for me.'

"It was lying against the wall where I was leaning. It was all wet and sticky, and when I took it in my hands the colour came off upon them, on my coat, too. I couldn't break it. She told me to put it on the floor and hold it with

my feet. I tried to hold the frame under the point of my boot so as not to harm the canvas. Then she said :

“ ‘For God’s sake stick your boot through it, now, now.’

“ I did, and then I pulled the stretchers apart. She turned away and put them on the fire.

“ I think I remember every word she said. There wasn’t very much. I can see everything in the room. But you’ve been there.

“ First, when the second blaze was nearly over, she said :

“ ‘We’re two lost souls.’ She was half laughing. You know the way she laughs. ‘We’re not going to save each other.’

“ She never turned round, and I never said a word. I just watched the fire dying down. I couldn’t have taken my eyes away from it. I think she was doing the same. There were hardly any flames left—one or two—when she said :

“ ‘I’m married to me art.’ She was laughing all the while now, and I could see her back going up and down. I was frozen, dead. ‘Married to me art, that’s what I am. Now we’re burning the bridegroom. Like they do in India. . . . No, that’s the widow. . . . I read all about it in a missionary book on Sundays at home. . . . It wouldn’t be any good, would it.’

“ I said no, I could see now, and I said good-bye.

“ ‘Don’t go,’ she said, but she didn’t look round.

“ I went out of the door and down the stairs.”

“ You passed me in the street,” said Anne.

“ Did I ? ”

“ Yes,” he went on, “ it was a good job I went then. But I don’t suppose it would have mattered, who had met me then. I was done. I went into a café, the other side of the river. I was determined to go away. That and the knowledge that I mustn’t go back to the hotel until you and Morry had gone away to dinner—that was all there was to me. I felt I was finished. I had made my throw, and it



hadn't come off. So nothing mattered very much either way.

"I came in here after you'd gone, a good while after. I couldn't stay here, and I wanted to see you before I went away. I sat in some café or other until it shut. I heard you moving about your room when I came back.

"This morning I tried to think it out. I tried to make up my mind whether I would tell you. After all, you're the only person I could have managed to tell it to. . . .

"It's a funny story. I'm very different from what I was two days ago. I seem to have lost my pride, my bad pride. It will all go soon. . . . I thought I'd like you to understand. . . . Yes, I'm glad I told you."

Anne looked at him. Her fingers rustled the leaves of the time-table. While he had spoken, the despair had slowly passed out of his voice, and she knew he was truly glad that she had been there to hear. To her it seemed that to have listened was natural to her, and it gave her a sense of happy calm that he had found relief in her. "I am one of those old women," she thought, and spoke her thought aloud.

Dennis glanced towards her, not understanding.

"I was only thinking of a dream I had." She bent her mind to the fact. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going away—to think about it all, I suppose. I haven't thought where I shall go. Not back to England, that's certain."

Anne opened the time-table upon her knees, and regarded it for a little while. Placing her finger against a line upon the page she looked up. Then, looking down again,

"At fifty-three minutes past one," she said, translating the figures slowly, "I leave for Avignon. Why not come with me?"

"I'd like to more than anything. . . ." Then he spoke ruminatively as though to himself. "I think I should have asked if I might, before you had gone. Yes, I am certain that I should, now that I have told you."

## EPILOGUE

THREE days later Maurice climbed the stair to Miss Etheredge's *appartement*. He carried in his hand the bag which he had taken on his fruitless journey to Lesdigues. Miss Etheredge opened to him. He stood, saying nothing, but unsteadily smiling, with a shamefastness, which he had anticipated and tried vainly to suppress on his way.

"You've come for the room," she said.

He shook his head.

"No, not that."

They stood together in the passage. In her presence he began to feel the dignity of his recent past. He was no longer shamefast, nor did he smile any more, and he spoke with the appearance of decision.

"No. . . . I thought I would like to see you. That's all. You see I didn't come that day you asked me."

"Very good of you, I'm sure. You think you're a hero at last. . . ."

He did not answer.

"When did you run away from Mrs. C. ?"

"Three days ago."

"Oh, the same night. You'll have to get somebody else to mother you now. . . . Or did you think I might be anxious to take on the job. No. . . ." Her voice quickened. "I've had enough of you. Enough ! I'm dead sick of it. What the devil d'you want to come worrying me for ? D'you want me to go and arrange things with your lady-love for you ?"

Maurice became stubborn with decision.

"I thought we were friends. That's why I came to see you. I wanted to say 'good-bye,' because I'm leaving. But I made a mistake. We weren't friends."

"All right. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter. Besides, I'm going in a minute."

"What's the hurry? You don't have to catch a train to heaven!"

"No, but I'm going."

Miss Etheredge seemed not to hear.

"So it busted with Mrs. C. It was too pretty to last. . . . Where's she gone?"

He shook his head.

"You take it pretty quietly. I shouldn't have thought it of you. You might weep a bit, make it more convincing. Or perhaps you're out for a Don Juan nowadays?"

"Perhaps. But don't let's quarrel about it, will we? It's not worth while."

"You think you're damned superior now, don't you. Tragic look in the eye. Tragic good-bye. 'It's not worth while,'" she mocked. "D'you think I care twopence whether you quarrel with me or not?"

"No. It was only that I didn't want to; but still . . ."

"All rotten conceit. You think you're the hell of a fine fellow because you've made a muck of everything—quite proud of it."

Inwardly he asked himself if it was true. The answer seemed to tremble like the needle of a balance, and he trembling still, while he said, holding out his hand:

"Well, good-bye."

She had dropped down on her knee to read the label on his bag.

"Maisons Lafitte," she said as though she had victoriously surprised a guarded secret. "Where's that—are you going to stay there long?"

"I don't know," he said. "Good-bye."

When he had gone, and Miss Etheredge could no longer hear the sound of his feet on the stairs, she went out of the



passage into her room. She sat on the cushioned seat and leaned her arms upon the marble table.

"The fool, the fool . . . the little fool," she said at length, and began to cry.



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